NO MAN'S LAND

By 'Sapper'

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BY

"SAPPER"

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TO

THE INFANTRYMAN

PREFACE

DURING the first few days of November 1914 Messines was lost—in silence; during the first few days of June 1917 Messines was regained—and the noise of its capture was heard in London. And during the two and a half years between these two events the game over the water has been going on.

It hasn't changed very much in the time—that game—to the player. To those who look on, doubtless, the difference is enormous. Now they speak easily of millions where before they thought diffidently of thousands. But to the individual—well, Messines is lost or Messines is won; and he is the performer. It is of those performers that I write: of the hole-and-corner work, of the little thumb-nail sketches which go to make up the big battle panels so ably depicted over the matutinal bacon and eggs.

And as one privileged to assist at times in that hole-and-corner work, I offer these pages as a small tribute to those who have done so far more than I: to the men who have borne the burden of the days, the months, the years—to the men who have saved the world—to the Infantrymen.

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PART I

THE WAY TO THE LAND

THE WAY TO THE LAND

I

It came suddenly when it did come, it may be remembered. Every one knew it was coming, and yet—it was all so impossible, so incredible. I remember Clive Draycott looking foolishly at his recall telegram in the club—he had just come home on leave from Egypt—and then brandishing it in front of my nose.

"My dear old boy," he remarked peevishly, "it's out of the question. I'm shooting on the 12th."

But he crossed the next day to Boulogne.

It was a Sunday morning, and Folkestone looked just the same as it always did look. Down by the Pavilion Hotel the usual crowd of Knuts in very tight trousers and very yellow shoes, with suits most obviously bought off the peg, wandered about with ladies of striking aspect. Occasional snatches of conversation, stray gems of wit, scintillated through the tranquil August air, and came familiarly to the ears of a party of some half-dozen men who stood by a pile of baggage at the entrance to the hotel.

"Go hon, Bill; you hare a caution, not 'arf." A shrill girlish giggle, a playful jerk of the "caution's" arm, a deprecating noise from his manly lips, which

may have been caused by bashfulness at the compliment, or more probably by the unconsumed portion of the morning Woodbine, and the couple moved out of hearing.

"I wonder," said a voice from the group, "if we are looking on the passing of the breed."

He was a tall, thin, spare fellow, the man who spoke; and amongst other labels on his baggage was one marked Khartoum. His hands were sinewy and his face was bronzed, while his eyes, brown and deep-set, held in them the glint of the desert places of the earth: the mark of the jungle where birds flit through the shadows like bars of glorious colour; the mark of the swamp where the ague mists lie dank and stagnant in the rays of the morning sun.

No one answered his remark; it seemed unnecessary, and each was busy with his own thoughts. What did the next few days hold in store for the world, for England, for him? The ghastly, haunting fear that possibly they held nothing for England gnawed at men's hearts. It would be incredible, inconceivable; but impossible things had happened before. Many must have felt that fear, but to none can it have been quite so personal, so hideously personal, as to the officers of the old Army and the Navy. To them it was as if their own honour were at stake, and I can see now a man opposite me almost sobbing with the fury and the shame of it when for a while we thought—the worst. But that was later.

"Time to go on board, gentlemen."

Almost as beings from another world, they passed through the noisy throng, so utterly inconsequent, so absolutely ignorant and careless. One cannot help wondering now just how that throng has answered the great call; how many lie in nameless graves, with the remnants of Ypres standing sentinel to their last sleep; how many have fought and cursed and killed in the mud-holes of the Somme; how many have chosen the other path, and even though they had no skill and aptitude to recommend them, are earning now their three and four pounds a week making munitions. But they *have* answered the call, that throng and others like them; they *have* learned out of the book of life and death; and perhaps the tall man with the bronzed face might find the answer to his question could he see England to-day. Only he lies somewhere between Fletre and Meteren, and beside him are twenty men of his battalion. He took it in the fighting before the first battle of Ypres . . .

"I call it a bit steep." A man in the Indian Cavalry broke the silence of the group who were leaning over the side watching the coast fade away. "In England two days after three years of it, and now here we are again. But the sun being over the yard-arm—what say you?"

With one last final look at the blue line astern, with one last involuntary thought—"Is it *au revoir*, or is it good-bye?"—they went below. The sun was indeed over the yard-arm, and the steward was a hospitable lad of cosmopolitan instincts. . . .

II

"It is impossible to *guarantee* a ticket to Marseilles." So the ticket vendor at Folkestone had informed them, and his pessimism was justified by future events.

The fun began at the Gare du Nord. From what I have since learned, I have often wished since that my mission in life had been to drive a fiacre in Paris during the early days of August '14. A taxi conjures up visions too wonderful to contemplate; but even with the humble horse-bus I feel that I should now be able to afford a piano, or whatever it is the multi-millionaire munition-man buys without a quiver. I might even get the missus a fur coat.

Every living soul in Paris seemed obsessed with the idea of going somewhere else; and the chances of the stranger within their gates approached those of an icicle in Hades, as our friends across the water would say. Finally, in despair, Draycott rushed into the road and seized a venerable flea-bitten grey that was ambling along with Monsieur, Madame, and all the little olive-branches sitting solemnly inside the cab. He embraced Madame, he embraced the olive-branches; finally—in despair—I believe he embraced Monsieur. He wept, he entreated, he implored them to take him to the Gare de Lyon. It was imperative. He would continue to kiss them without cessation and in turn, if only they would take him and his belongings to the Gare

de Lyon. He murmured: "Anglais—officier anglais"; he wailed the mystic word, "Mobilisation." Several people who were watching thought he was acting for the cinematograph, and applauded loudly; others were convinced he was mad, and called for the police.

But Monsieur—God bless him!—and Madame—God bless her!—and all the little olive-branches—God bless them!—decided in his favour; and having piled two suit-cases and a portmanteau upon that creaking cab, he plunged into the family circle.

It was very hot; he was very hot; they were very hot; and though Draycott confesses that he has done that familiar journey between the two stations in greater comfort, he affirms that never has he done it with a greater sense of elation and triumph. The boat train to Marseilles, he reflected complacently; if possible a bath first; anyway, a sleeper, a comfortable dinner, and——

"Parbleu, M'sieur; la Gare de Lyon c'est fermée." Madame's voice cut into his reflections.

As in a dream he extricated himself from to-night's supper and three sticky children, and gazed at the station. They were standing six deep around the steps—a gesticulating, excited mob; while at the top, by the iron railings, a cordon of soldiers kept them back. Inside, between the railings and the station, there was no one save an odd officer or two who strolled about, smoking and talking.

Mechanically he removed his baggage and dumped it in the road; mechanically he re-kissed the entire

party; he says he even kissed the flea-bitten grey. Then he sat down on a suit-case and thought.

It was perfectly true: the Gare de Lyon was shut to all civilians; the first shadow of war had come. As if drawn by a magnet the old men were there, the men who remembered the last time when the Prussian swine had stamped their way across the fields of France. Their eyes were bright, their shoulders thrown back as they glanced appraisingly at the next generation—their sons who would wipe out Sedan for ever from the pages of history. There was something grimly pathetic and grimly inspiring in the presence of those old soldiers: the men who had failed through no fault of their own.

"Not again," they seemed to say; "for God's sake, not a second time. This time—Victory. Wipe it out—that stain."

They had failed, true; but there were others who would succeed; and it was their presence that made one feel the unconquerable spirit of France.

III

The French officer in charge was polite, but firmly non-committal.

"There is a train which will leave here about midnight, we hope. If you can get a seat on it—well and good. If not——" he shrugged his shoulders superbly, and the conversation closed.

It was a troop train apparently, and in the course of time it would arrive at Marseilles—perhaps. It

would not be comfortable. "Mais, que voulez-vous, M'sieur ? c'est la guerre."

At first he had not been genial ; but when he had grasped the fact that mufti invariably cloaked the British officer, *en permission*, he had become more friendly.

He advised dinner ; in these days, as he truly remarked, one never knows. Also, what was England going to do ?

"Fight," Draycott answered promptly, with an assurance he did not feel. "Fight, mon Colonel ; ça va sans dire."

"C'est bien," he murmured, and stood up. "Vive l'Angleterre." Gravely he saluted, and Draycott took off his hat.

"Mon Colonel, vive la France." They shook hands ; and having once again solemnly saluted one another, he took the Frenchman's advice and went in search of dinner.

In the restaurant itself everything seemed normal. To the close observer there was possibly an undue proportion of women who did not eat, but who watched with hungry, loving eyes the men who were with them. Now and again one would look round, and in her face was the pitiful look of the hunted animal ; then *he* would speak, and with a smile on her lips and a jest on her tongue she would cover a heart that seemed like to burst with the agony of it. Inexorably the clock moved on : the finger of fate that was to take him from her. They had quarrelled, *sans doute*—who has not ? there had been days when

they had not spoken. He had not been to her all that he might have been, but . . . But—he was her man.

And now he was going; in half an hour her Pierre was going to leave her. For him the bustle and glamour of the unknown; for her—the empty chair, the lonely house, and her thoughts. Dear God! but war is a bad thing for the women who stop behind. . . .

And on Draycott's brain a tableau is stamped indelibly, just a little tableau he saw that night in the restaurant of the Gare de Lyon. They came, the three of them, up the flight of steps from the seething station below, into the peace and quiet of the room, and a roar of sound swept in with them as the doors swung open. Threading their way between the tables, they stopped just opposite to where he sat, and instinctively he turned his head away. For her the half-hour was over, her Pierre had gone; and it is not given to a man to look on a woman's grief save with a catching in the throat and a pricking in the eyes. It is so utterly terrible in its overwhelming agony at the moment, so absolutely final; one feels so helpless.

The little boy clambered on to a chair and sat watching his mother gravely; a grey-haired woman with anxious eyes held one of her hands clasped tight. And the girl—she was just a girl, that's all—sat dry-eyed and rigid, staring, staring, while every now and then she seemed to whisper something through lips that hardly moved.

"Maman," a childish voice piped out. "Maman." He solemnly extended a small and grubby hand towards her.

Slowly her head came round, her eyes took him in—almost uncomprehendingly; she saw the childish face, the little dirty hand, and suddenly there came to her the great gift of the Healer.

"Oh! mon bébé, mon pauv' p'tit bébé!" She picked him up off the chair and, clutching him in her arms, put her face on his head and sobbed out her heart.

"Come on." Draycott got up suddenly and turned to the man he was dining with. "Let's go." They passed close to the table, and the fat waiter, wiping his eyes on a dinner napkin, and the grey-haired woman leaning gently over her, were talking in low tones. They seemed satisfied as they watched the sobbing girl; and they were people of understanding. "Pauvre petite," muttered the waiter as they passed. "Mon Dieu! quelle vâche de guerre."

"My God!" said Draycott, as they went down the steps. "I didn't realise before what war meant to a woman. And we shall never realise what it means to our own women. We only see them before we go. Never after."

IV

Half an hour later he encountered Monsieur le Colonel once again, and suggested that they should split a bottle of wine together if he could spare the time. It was then nine o'clock, and the three hours

till midnight loomed uninviting. His only hope, as he told him, was that the train at present standing at the platform was not going to be typical of the one he was to embark on. It seemed to be of endless length, and presented a most enticing spectacle. Four fortunates in each compartment had got the racks, otherwise the passengers stood: on the footboards, in the corridors, on the seats. If any one opened a door the pressure was such that at least six people fell on to the platform, and in one carriage a small *poilu* was being squeezed through the open window. In the end he went—suddenly like a cork out of a bottle, and the human mass closed up behind him.

Draycott laughed, the Colonel laughed, and went on laughing. He laughed unrestrainedly, even as a man who enjoys a secret jest. At last, with some difficulty, he controlled his mirth.

"Monsieur," he remarked gravely, but with twinkling eyes, "I fear your hopes are ill-founded. This *is* the midnight train."

"Under those circumtances," Draycott murmured, with a ghastly attempt at mirth, "the wine is off. I must go and secure my sleeping-berth."

Have you ever seen a fly-paper which has come "to the end of a perfect day"? Lumps of glutinous flies drop off on one's head, and still it seems as full as ever. It was the same with that train. Lumps of Frenchmen, permanently welded together, fell out periodically, unstuck themselves, and departed, only to return in a few moments with the long thin loaves of France and bottles of wine. Sometimes they got

in again, sometimes they didn't—but they were happy, those poilus. What matter anything, bar killing the Boche? And that was the only thing in the air that night. . . .

In every carriage it was the same, until suddenly there came salvation. A horse-box, with two horses in it and some grooms singing the Marseillaise, loomed out of the darkness, and into it the fed-up wanderer hurled his bag. Yet again did he embrace every one, including the horses; and then, overcome with his labours, he sank into a corner and laughed. And it was only when they had been under way for two hours that he remembered his two other bags, sitting alone and forlorn at the Gare de Lyon. . . .

It was a great journey that. The heat was sweltering, and they stopped at every station between Paris and Marseilles—generally twice, because the train was too long for the platform. And at every station the same programme was repeated. Completely regardless of the infuriated whistles and toots of the French conductors, absolutely unmindful of the agonised shouts of "En voiture, en voiture! Montez, messieurs, le train part," the human freight unloaded itself and made merry. As far as they were concerned, let the train "part." It never did, and the immediate necessity was the inner man. But it was all very nerve-racking

At times there were forty Frenchmen in the truck, at others none. Whether they fell off or were pushed Draycott knew not: they simply occurred—periodically. One man disappeared for five hours, and then

came back again; possibly he was walking to stretch his legs; there was plenty of time. But to those who travel in trains de luxe, let me recommend a journey in a cattle-truck, where, if one is lucky, one gets a front seat, and sits on the floor with legs dangling over the side; a bottle of wine in one hand, a loaf of bread in the other, and a song when the spirit is in one. No breathless rushing through space: just a gentle amble through the ripening corn, with the poppies glinting red and the purple mountains in the distance; with a three days' growth on one's chin and an amalgamation of engine soots and dust on one's face that would give a dust storm off the desert points and a beating. That is the way to travel, even if the journey lasts from Sunday night to Tuesday evening, and a horse occasionally stamps on your face. And even so did Clive Draycott, Captain of "Feet," go to the great war. . . .

V

Marseilles has always been a town of mystery—the gateway of the East. Going from it one leaves European civilisation—if such a thing can be said to exist to-day—and steps into the unknown. Coming to it through that appalling Gulf of Lyons, beside which the dreaded Bay of Biscay seems like the proverbial duck-pond, Notre Dame de la Garde holds out a welcoming hand, and breathes of fast trains and restaurant cars, and London. It is the town

of tongues, the city of nations. It is not French; it is universal.

And never can Marseilles have been so universal as in the early days of August 1914. Usually a port of call only, then it was a terminus. The ships came in, but did not leave: there seemed to be a concensus of opinion amongst skippers that the *Goeben* was a nasty thing to meet alone on a dark night. And so the overcrowded docks filled up with waiting vessels, while Lascars and Levantine Greeks, Cingalese and Chinamen, jostled one another in the cafés.

The other jostlers were principally Americans of fabulous wealth: at least as they thronged the shipping offices they said so. Also they were very angry, which is where they differed from the Cingalese and Chinamen, who liked Marseilles and prayed to remain for ever. But the Americans desired to return to God's own country—they and their wives and their sons and daughters; moreover, they expressed their desire fluently and frequently. There is something stupendous about an American magnate insisting on his rights on a hot day, when he can't get them. . . . It cheers a man up when he is waiting and wondering—and England is still silent.

It was just as Draycott had made the unpleasant discovery that no longer did the weekly boat run from Marseilles to Tunis and thence to Malta, and was debating on the riva merits of a journey through Italy, and thence by Syracuse to the island of goats; or a journey through Spain to Gibraltar, and thence

by sea—with luck, that a railway magnate entered and gave his celebrated rendering of a boiler explosion. It appeared—when every one had partially recovered—that he was the proud possessor of ten francs and three sous. He also admitted to a wife suffering from something with a name that hurt, and various young railway magnates of both sexes. It transpired that the ten francs and three sous had been laboriously collected from his *ménage* only that morning; that the youngest hopeful had wept copiously on losing her life's savings; and further, that it was the limit of his resources. He had letters of credit, or something dangerous of that sort, to the extent of a few million; he was prepared to buy the whole one-donkey country by a stroke of the pen, but—in hard cash—he had ten francs and three sous. . . .

It was pathetic; it was dreadful. An American multi-millionaire, one of those strange beings of whom one reads, who corner tin-tacks and things, and ruin or make thousands with a word, reduced to ten francs and three sous.

For not another cent piece did America's pride obtain; not another sou to add to the three. Politely, firmly, a harassed clerk shooed him away. No, he could not tell him when the next boat would sail—perhaps to-morrow, perhaps in a fortnight. He did not know, and he did not care how he proposed to live during that period, and he had no intention of furnishing him with any money to do it with. He had definite orders from his firm: no cheques cashed under any circumstances whatever. He was

sorry the gentleman didn't like Marseilles, or war, or France, or him personally; he regretted deeply that the gentleman's wife liked peaches with every meal, and hoped he'd manage all right on his ten francs; he—— And then came the interruption.

They crowded to the door, and watched them coming. Occasionally a cheer rang out, but for the most part they came in silence, passing through the ranks of people that lined the road each side. Half way down the column a band blared forth, and every now and then the Colonel in front lifted his right hand gravely in a salute. They were small men, the poilus of that regiment; but they marched well, with a swing, and the glint of white teeth. Sometimes they waved a greeting to a girl on the footpath, and she would smile back, or throw them a flower or a kiss. And like a ripple going down the lines of spectators, men took off their hats suddenly. The Colours were passing. . . .

Almost dazedly the American took off his hat as the ripple reached him; then he put it on again and turned to Draycott.

"Hell!" he remarked tersely, "and I've been worryin' over a ten-franc note. I guess I feel a bit small." He turned and followed the regiment, with his hands deep in his pockets, and his shoulders squared.

VI

It came through the following afternoon—the news they had been waiting for; and now for a certain

period the curtain of discretion must be drawn. I gather that Draycott has dim recollections of a stout field officer endeavouring to stand on a small marble-topped table, with a glass of beer in each hand. He was making a speech—chiefly in Hindustani—to the frenzied mob of cheering Frenchmen around him. Then he came to the point when the best people say "Vive la France!" He remembered he had a hat on; he remembered he ought to take it off; he did. The only thing he forgot was the beer. But as he said later when they sorted him out, it was an old suit, and England didn't declare war every day. . . .

The following night they left in an ancient old cargo boat, skippered by the type of man who has since made our mercantile marine the glory of the world. His job was to get his peculiarly odoriferous cargo home to his owners as soon as possible; beyond that he either failed or refused to look. The entire German Navy might have been waiting outside for all he cared; he merely consumed a little more whisky, and conducted morning prayers. He would give them no assurance; they went at their own risk, but, if the boat got there, he would land them at Gibraltar. And having thought the matter over, and realised that firstly a journey through Italy might result in their being kept as prisoners of war; secondly, that a journey through Spain would probably take a fortnight at least; and thirdly, that any way they could do neither as they could get no money, Draycott and his friends embarked with the

patent manure, and watched the lights of Marseilles growing fainter and fainter till they dropped below the horizon astern.

It was an uneventful voyage, and never for one hour after the first day were they out of sight of land. It was the only concession the skipper would make for the safety of his boat ; and so they jogged along at a peaceful ten knots and watched the sun set each evening in a blaze of golden glory over the rocky coast of Spain. For the first time since leaving England a week before, they were able to think. In the rush to Paris, in the horse-box to Marseilles, in Marseilles itself, they had been too busy. Besides, they were outsiders. . . .

Now, England was in it ; the thing which they had known in their hearts was coming, ever since a kindly senior subaltern had first taken it upon himself to shape their destinies, had actually come. And bitterest thought of all—*they* were not there.

"It can't last more than three months." A pessimistic garrison gunner from Malta, who was playing patience, cheated savagely. "I tell you no European country could stand it." Undoubtedly the fatuous drivel of certain writers had influenced even the Army itself. "Peace will be declared before Christmas. An' I'll have sat on that cursed island, and whenever I see a ship I'd like to poop at, the searchlight will go out, an' I'll be bitten by sand flies." He glared morosely at Draycott ; until, suddenly, a dawning look of joy spread over his face. "It's coming out. I swear it's coming out!"

"You cheated," remarked an onlooker cruelly. "I saw you with my own eyes."

It was then that he burst into tears. . . .

Shut off as they were from the outside world—the old tramp had no wireless—they could only wonder, and wait, fuming with impatience. What had happened? Had the fleets met? Had the wonderful day which the German Navy was popularly supposed to be living for—had it arrived? And if it had—what had been the result? They could only lean over the stern and try and grasp the one monumental fact—war. And what did it hold in store? . . .

Visions of forlorn hopes, visions of glory, visions of the glamour of war rose unbidden in their minds. And then, when they had got as far as that, the smell of that patent manure obtruded itself once again, and the dreamers of honours to come passed sadly down the gangway to the Levantine villain who presided over the vermouth and the gin. Which might be taken as the text for a sermon on things as they are. In this war it is the patent manure and the vermouth which dominate the situation as far as the fighters, at any rate, are concerned. The talkers may think otherwise, may prate of soul-stirring motives, and great ideals. But for the soldiers, life is a bit too grim and overpowering for gloss. After a spell they come for their vermouth, for something to help nerves a trifle jangled, something to give a contrast to stark reality, and having had it they go back again to the patent manure; while the onlookers

see visions and dream dreams. I suppose it's a fair division of labour! . . .

VII

It was the distinguished-looking gentleman in blue who came alongside just after they dropped anchor at the Rock, who brought the glorious news. He ascended the gangway with great dignity, and disappeared into some secret place with the skipper. After some delay and a slight commotion, various flags were hoisted, and he majestically appeared again. It seemed that the hoisting of the flags had apparently been successful. Suspicion had been averted by this simple act; there was no longer any danger of being made a target for enthusiastic gunners. And, what was more to the point, the distinguished gentleman was now free to impart his great tidings.

"The German fleet, gentlemen," he remarked genially, "has ceased to exist."

"Who said so?" asked a doubting voice.

"It is in all the Spanish papers." The Admiral, or whatever he was, eyed the speaker compassionately. "A great action has taken place in the North Sea; we have lost nineteen big ships in addition to destroyers, and the German fleet is wiped out."

"It doesn't seem good enough, does it?" murmured a graceless member of the group.

"But if it's really authentic?" Draycott turned

to him doubtfully. "And there must be something in it if it's in all the Spanish papers."

"On the contrary," returned the graceless one. "It is precisely that fact that makes me believe there is nothing in it."

The remark seemed conclusive; and yet so detailed was the information all over Gib, so definite the lists of vessels sunk on each side, that even intelligent Scorps—as the inhabitants of the place are known—were impressed. Strangely enough, exactly the same detailed lists, with just sufficient difference to make them credible, were in all the Italian papers at the same time—though this only transpired later.

At the moment nothing much mattered but the time of the next boat going East: it was their own little personal future that counted. A naval battle—yes, perhaps; nineteen ships down—the German fleet as well; fifty or sixty thousand men—gone, finished, wiped out. And yet it was the next boat they wanted to know about.

Callous—I think not; merely a total incapability to realise a thing so stupendous. It has been the same all through the war: the tragedies have been too big for human minds to grasp. It is the little things that tell; the isolated thumb-nail impressions that live in one's mind, and will go with us to the grave. The one huddled form lying motionless in the shell-hole, with its staring, sightless eyes; the one small, but supreme sacrifice: that is the thing which hits—hits harder than the *Lusitania*, or any other of the gigantic panels of the war. The pin-pricks

we feel; the sledge hammer merely stuns. And the danger is that those who have felt the pin-pricks may confuse them with the sledge hammer; may lose the right road in the bypaths of personal emotion. War means so infinitely much to the individual; the individual means so infinitely little to war. Only it is sometimes hard to remember that simple fact. . . .

VIII

It was from the top of the Rock that they watched their evil-smelling boat depart, to plug on northward up the home trail, unperturbed by naval battles or rumours thereof. And it was from the top of the Rock they first saw the smoke of the P. and O., outward bound, on which they were destined to complete the journey. Below lay the bay, dotted with German and Austrian ships caught on the high seas at the outbreak of war; a destroyer was going half-speed towards the Atlantic; a cruiser lay in dock, her funnels smoking placidly. Out towards Algeciras an American battleship, with her peculiar steel trellis turrets, was weighing anchor; and in the distance, across the Straits, Africa, rugged and inhospitable, shimmered in the heat haze of an August day.

"So long." The gunner subaltern waved a weary hand from his point of vantage, where he was inspecting life with a telescope. "There's your barge, but she won't leave till to-morrow. If this

goes on for much longer, my nerves will give way under the strain. The excitement is too great."

It appears that Draycott had forebodings even before he got on board that P. and O. Since then she has become almost historic amongst those of the Regular Army whose abode at the beginning of the war was overseas. Save for the fact that no one was playing the harmonium, or any other musical instrument, the appearance of her decks as they came alongside was reminiscent of one of those delightful pleasure steamers on which one may journey, at comparatively small cost, up and down the Thames. A seething mob of people, almost exclusively composed of the male sex, glared furiously at them and one another—but principally at them—as they came up the gangway, and departed in search of the purser. All the stairs down to the dining saloon were occupied by morose passengers, and an enlivening altercation was in progress between two elderly gentlemen of ferocious aspect anent the remnants of what had once been a cushion. A mild-looking being, closely clutching a tired deck-chair, was descending to the dining saloon, where infuriated men were loudly thumping the tables.

"Good heavens, gentlemen! what do you want?" A haggard purser peered at them from his office. "Berths!" He broke into a shout of maniacal laughter, and then pulled himself together. "The fourteenth stair leading to the engine-room is not taken, but there's an exhaust pipe passes under it, and it becomes too hot to sit on. There is room for

two in a coal bunker which should be empty by to-night; otherwise, the hold, if you can find room."

"But what's all the trouble," they queried peevishly. "Surely——"

"Trouble!" The purser swallowed hard. "We have on board eighty-four generals, two hundred and twenty colonels, and one thousand eight hundred and ninety-one what-nots of junior rank. They have all been recalled from leave; they have all come by this boat. The eighteenth breakfast is now being served—perhaps." With a dreadful cry he seized the brandy bottle, while they faded slowly and sadly away. There are things too terrible for contemplation. . . .

It was a wonderful trip—that final stage to the Half Way House of Malta. There was the dreadful incident of the short-sighted subaltern who got into a full Colonel's bed by mistake, when that worthy officer had just gone down on four no trumps redoubled. In vain to point out the similarity of engine-room gratings—in vain to plead short sight. The subsequent scene lingered in the memory for days.

There was the case of the sleep walker, who got loose in the hold, and ambled heavily over four hundred infuriated human sardines, till he finally fell prostrate into what was apparently the abode of spare china.

Last but not least there was the dreadful Case of the Major-General's Bath. Of this Draycott speaks first hand; he, personally, was an awe-struck spectator. Now the question of baths on that boat

was not one to be trifled with. The queue for the pit of a popular play was as nothing to the procession that advanced to the bath in the morning. And the least penalty for sharp practice with regard to one's turn was death.

Into the bathroom, then, prepared for him by a perspiring Lascar, the Major-General stepped. At the time Draycott did not know he was a Major-General: he was just a supreme being resplendent in a green silk dressing-gown. The door closed, only to open again at once.

"I have forgotten my sponge," he announced. "I shall not be a moment." He gazed directly at Draycott, who bowed, choking slightly. It was inconceivable to imagine that the resplendent one thought he might—to put it in the vulgar tongue—pinch his bath. By nature he was a timorous individual, and that green dressing-gown—ye gods! perish the thought.

It was while he waited humbly that the catastrophe occurred. Advancing magnificently came a second being, still more resplendent, in a purple dressing-gown; and he was complete, with towel, sponge, and soap. His eye would have impaled a London taxi-driver, and, scenting trouble, the Lascar made himself scarce.

"It is preposterous to keep people waiting in this manner," he boomed; "perfectly monstrous." The next moment the door was shut and bolted, and Draycott followed the Lascar's example—just in time: green dressing-gown was returning with his

sponge. In official parlance, a general action seemed imminent. . . .

It opened with the crash of heavy artillery in the shape of strange and loud expletives of an Indian nature, to be followed immediately by an attack in force on the hostile position. This resulted in a sanguinary repulse, and the attacking party hopped round, apparently in pain, nursing a stubbed toe. The temporary set-back, however, seemed only to raise the *morale* of the force; and after a further heavy bombardment of a similar nature to the one before, a succession of blows were delivered in rapid succession at all points along the front, which suddenly gave way and the victor was precipitated in some confusion, but triumphant, upon the floor of the captured position.

How true it is, that great utterance of our handbooks on war! "Every leader must bear in mind the necessity of immediately consolidating a newly won position, in order to resist the counter-attack of the enemy, which sooner or later is bound to be launched."

In this case it was distinctly sooner. With a loud shout the defending troops arose from a recumbent position—to wit, the bath—and with deadly accuracy launched the contents of a large bucket of hot water upon the still prostrate foe.

"What is the meaning of this monstrous intrusion?" The battle cry of the purples rang through the quivering air.

"You s'scoundrel! you impudent s'scoundrel!"

With a loud spluttering noise the greens got up and assumed a belligerent attitude. "You m'miserable villain! that is *my* bath. How d'dare you—how d'dare you—throw w'water over me. D'do you know what I am, sir? I am a Major-General, sir, and I shall report your infamous c'conduct to the captain."

"And I, sir," howled his opponent, "will have you put in irons; I will have you chained to the crow's-nest, if they have one on board. Keel-hauled, sir, amongst the barnacles and things. I, sir, I am a Lieutenant-General."

Draycott was still slightly dazed when he landed in Malta.

IX

Thus did he reach the Half Way House on his journey to the Land; and at that Half Way House he was destined to remain for a short space. It may be that there is a harder school than forced inaction; if so, I have no desire to become a pupil. "Those are your orders; there is nothing more to be said." Only too true; there *is* nothing more to be said—but thinking is a different matter. . . .

And what brush can paint the indescribable longing of those who were fitted for it, who were trained in its ways, to get to their goal—to get to the Land of Promise. For it was a Land of Promise; it was the land of the regular soldier's dreams. And in those

days there was no thought of the dream becoming a nightmare. . . .

So Clive Draycott and those with him, in that little rocky outpost of Empire, carried on as cheerfully as a wet sirocco wind and an ever-present heart-burning to be in France would allow, and waited for deliverance.

Perhaps they suffered more acutely than even those who were in the Great Retreat. Out of it, as they thought, out of it. Would they ever be able to hold up their heads again?

And then the worst thing of all: that awful day when the news came through—the news which England got one Sunday. Fellows kept it from the men as far as they could; they covered up places on the map with their hand, unostentatiously; and when they had found Compiègne they folded the map up, and told the men everything was well. It was that evening that Draycott and a pal watched the sun go down over Gozo from St. Paul's Bay, where the statue stands in the sea, and the shallow blue water ripples against the white sandstone.

"My God! it can't be true!" His companion turned to him, and his eyes were tired. "It can't be true. We're b——" And his lips would not frame the word.

Only, in their hearts they knew it was true; and in their hearts a dreadful hopelessness wormed its bitter way. But crushing it down there was another feeling—stronger and more powerful. England *could* not be beaten, *would* not be beaten; the thing was

impossible, unbelievable. Triumphant it arose, that great certainty. It arose then, and has never died since, though at times the sky has been black and the storm clouds ominous. They knew that all would be well; and now—after three years—all is well. Their faith has been justified, the faith of the men who waited their call to the work. Only a small proportion remain to see that justification with their own eyes; the Land has claimed the rest. Ypres, the Marne, Neuve Chapelle, Festubert—names well-nigh forgotten in the greater battles of to-day—in each and all of them the seed of "a contemptible little Army" has been sown. Thus it was ordained in the Book of Fate.

But at the moment there were just two men, sick of heart, watching the sun, in a blaze of golden glory, setting over Gozo. . . .

X

Draycott's deliverance from the Half Way House came in three or four weeks. With the men swarming in the rigging, and the Territorials who had come to replace them cheering from the shore, the transport moved slowly down the Grand Harbour past the French and British warships that lay at anchor. It would indeed be pleasing to record the fact that the departing warriors sang patriotic songs concerning their country's greatness; and that the officers with a few well-chosen words improved the shining hour, and pointed the moral of the great Entente with

special reference to the warships around them. But being a truthful—or, shall we say, comparatively truthful—historian, I regret that it cannot be done.

Such songs as did rise above the medley of catcalls and gibes of a dark nature which passed in playful badinage between the sister services were of a nature exclusively frivolous; and the conversation of such officers as were not consuming the midday cocktail consisted entirely of a great thankfulness that they had seen the last of an abominable island, and a fervent prayer that they would never see it again.

The relief of it—the blessed relief! They would be in time for the end of the show any way, which was something. They were not going to miss it all; they would be able to look their pals in the face after it was over. A few, it is true, shook their heads and communed together in secret places: a paltry few, who looked serious, and spoke of a long war and a bloody war such as had never been thought of. Avaunt pessimism! war was war, and a damned good show at the best of times for those who were trained to its ways. The Germans had asked for it for years, and now they had got it—and serve 'em right. A good sporting show, and with any luck they would get the fag end of the hunting at home after peace was declared.

Thus it was, nearly three years ago ; thus it has been, with slight modifications, ever since. A nation of sportsmen going merrily forth, with the ideal of sport as their guide, to fight a nation of swine, with the ideal of fouling as theirs. And so the world wags

on in its funny old way, while the gods laugh, and laugh, and laugh. . . .

XI

On the boat Draycott hardly realised. For the first week of the three he spent in England he hardly realised—he was too excited. He was going out; that was all that mattered; until one morning his eyes were opened to his personal case. It is easy to see things where others are concerned; but in one's own case. . . .

He was at home on three days' leave, and the girl was there too.

"Good Lord!" he remarked at breakfast; "Jerry Thornton gone too." His eye was running down the casualty list. "Whole battalion must have taken it in the neck—five officers killed, fourteen wounded. I wish to heaven——" He looked up, and the words died away on his lips.

"I didn't realise what war meant to women." His remarks at the Gare de Lyon hit him like a blow. For he had seen the look in the girl's eyes; he had seen the look in his mother's. Blotted out at once, it is true; effaced the instant they had realised he was watching them; but—too late. He had seen.

"Was that Major Thornton, dear?" His mother was speaking. "The one who shot so well?" Her voice was casual; her acting superb. And God! how they can act—these women of ours.

For a moment something stuck in his throat. He saw just such another breakfast room, with a woman staring with dull eyes at the laconic name in the paper: a name which so baldly confirmed the wire she had had three days before. Stunned, still dazed by the shock, she sat silently, apathetically; as yet she could hardly feel the blow which Fate had dealt her. In time perhaps; just now—well, it couldn't be; there must be some mistake. Other men had died—true; but—not hers. He was different; there *must* be some mistake. . . .

For each and every name in that list Clive Draycott of a sudden realised the same thing was occurring. And then he saw it—personally; he felt it—personally; he realised that it concerned him—personally. Those other women had looked, just as had his mother and the girl, a few weeks ago. Those other women had laughed and joked and asked casual questions to cover their true feelings, just the same. Those other women had been through it all and—— "We only see them before we go—never after." In the theatre, at the restaurant, playing the fool with us, dancing with us—then we see them; afterwards—when the train has gone and we are looking out of the window or talking with the man opposite, then, we do not see them. And it is just as well. "Mon Dieu! Quelle vâche de guerre." . . .

Something of all this did Draycott feel at that moment; something which caught him and shook him and mocked him. Something which whispered, "You ass, you wretched ass! You think it's

you who will suffer; you think it's you who will be acclaimed a hero. Fool! Your sufferings, your achievements, whether you live or die, are as nothing to those of these two women. You may wear the cross for a moment's heroism: they bear it all the time. And they get no praise; they just endure." . . .

Yes; something like that struck him for the first time as being personally applicable to himself. And having looked thoughtfully out of the window for a moment, he laughed gently, and then he spoke.

"That's the fellow," he remarked quietly. "An' if the tea ain't cold I'll take another dish. Three glasses of the old man's port, Dolly, is enough. I had four last night."

XII

A week later he sat in a mud bath at Havre, which went by the name of a rest camp; the Way to the Land was nearly trodden. Thousands of others had sat in that glutinous mud before him; hundreds of thousands were destined to do so after. And each and all of them were thinking men; wondering in a greater or less degree according to the size and activity of their grey matter what it was all about. To some the Unknown gave the prospect of sport, and they thanked their stars they were nearly there; to some it gave the prospect of Duty, and they trusted they would not fail. With some the fear of the future blotted out their curiosity; with others curiosity left no room for fear. But in every case

they had something to think about—even if it were only the intense discomfort of their surroundings. And in every case the woman over the water had—nothing.

By cattle trucks and carriages, by so-called fast trains and unabashed troop trains they left in batches big and small; and others came and filled the gaps. The Land was calling; the Seed must not be delayed.

. . . . .

"You'll have to wait till it's dark." A weary Quartermaster, wandering through Ypres, met Draycott and stopped. "Thank God! you've come. We've got three officers left and a hundred and twenty men."

"Where are they?" he demanded. "How shall I find them?"

"Very likely you won't." The other laughed mirthlessly. "I'll take you up to-night—we walk the last bit to the trenches. If a flare goes up—stand still; there's no other rule."

"You're about done in, Seymour," said Draycott, watching him keenly. "What's the trouble?"

"The trouble is Hell." The Quartermaster passed his hand wearily over his forehead. "Utter, absolute, complete—Hell. The boys have been in the front line for twenty-one days; and"—he spoke with a sudden dreadful earnestness—"the end is not far off."

"My God!" muttered Draycott, "is it as bad as that?"

. . . . .

No trenches, no dug outs, no reserves. Ceaseless German attacks, rain, mud, death. And then, three

or four days of icy coldness, with the bitter Arctic wind cutting the sodden, tired, breaking men like a knife. Fighting every hour, with rifles and bayonets and fists—sleepless, tired out, finished. Only a spirit which made possible the impossible supported them: only the glory of their traditions held the breaking line of Old Contemptibles to the end. And at the end—they died. . . .

But their spirit lives on, undimmed, untarnished. It is the spirit of the New Armies—the Civilian Armies of Britain. They were training back in England when Clive Draycott went to the Land: they were learning the message of the old Regulars from New Zealand to Yukon. It is not learned in a day—that message: there is much watering and weeding to do before the seed can reach perfection, but the Land would not wait. . . . It was greedy then—as now; the only difference was the amount of grain available. And when Clive Draycott went to it there was very little. To God Almighty the praise. What there was, was very good.

PART II

THE LAND

I. A DAY OF PEACE

II. OVER THE TOP

III. THE MAN-TRAP

IV. A POINT OF DETAIL

V. MY LADY OF THE JASMINE

VI. MORPHIA

VII. BENDIGO JONES—HIS TREE

VIII. THE SONG OF THE BAYONET

I

A DAY OF PEACE

"For the fourteenth morning in succession I rise to a point of order. Why is there no marmalade?" The Doctor glared round the breakfast table. "I perceive a pot of unhealthy-looking damson, and a tin of golden syrup, the greater part of which now adorns the infant's face. Why is there no marmalade?"

"Could I remind you that there is a war on two miles up the road, my splay-footed bolus-booster?" With a grand rolling of his R's, the man who had driven a railway through the Rocky Mountains, and who now boasted the badges of a subaltern in His Majesty's Corps of Royal Engineers, let drive. "Ye come to live with us much against our will, because you're a poor homeless wanderer——"

"All dressed up and nowhere to go," broke in the Doctor mournfully.

"You come to live with us, I say," went on the Scotchman, "and then do nothing but criticise our food and our morals."

"Heaven knows they both need it. Pass me what's left of the syrup, little one. Scrape the rest

of it off your chin, my cherub, and wrap it up in a handkerchief and take it up to the trenches with you."

"You're vewy wude." The junior subaltern adjusted the balance in the matter of the letter R with the Scotchman. Two months ago he had been at home—in peace time he would still have been at school. But of such mixtures is the present British Army made. "It's *my* face."

As a statement of fact the remark left nothing to be desired; as a statement of expediency, when other infants were present, the same cannot be said. Words, in fact, were trembling on the tongue of a veteran of six months when the C.O. came suddenly into the room.

"Bring me an egg," he shouted to the mess waiter in the kitchen next door. "Listen to this, my bonnie boys." He produced a paper from his coat pocket and sat down at the table. "Secret. A large object has fallen beside the sap leading out to Vesuvius crater. It is about the size of a rum jar, and is thought to be filled with explosive. It has been covered with sandbags and its early removal would seem desirable, as the sap is frequently bombarded —Damn it, this egg's addled. Take it away, it's got spots on it. Where did I get to? Oh! yes—bombarded with aerial darts and rifle grenades." He replaced the paper in his pocket and reached for the teapot.

"Thought to be filled with explosive!" The Scotchman looked up sarcastically from the letter he was censoring. "What's it likely to be filled with?"

"Marmalade, ducky," remarked the Doctor, still harping on his grievance.

"In addition to that the Pumpkin desires my presence at the Centre Battalion Head-quarters at 10 ak emma." The C.O. was prodding his second egg suspiciously.

The Pumpkin, it may be explained in parenthesis, was the not unsuitable nickname of the Divisional General.

"Is the old man coming round the trenches?" Jackson, the subaltern in whose tender care reposed the crater of Vesuvius and all that appertained thereto, including rum jars, looked up with mild interest.

The C.O. glanced at the message beside him. "'The G.O.C. wishes to meet the Engineer Officer in charge of Left Section, at Centre Battalion Head-quarters, at 10 a.m., A.A.A. Message ends.' There in a nutshell you have the glorious news."

Breakfast is never a loquacious meal, and for a while silence reigned, broken only by a few desultory remarks as to the vileness of the food produced by the officer responsible for the mess catering, and the exorbitant price he demanded for it—statements which had staled with much vain repetition.

"For heaven's sake dry up," he remarked peevishly. "You've had sardines on toast twenty-one nights running; what more do you want? Listen to the words of Sapper Mackintosh—the pudding-faced marvel. This"—he held up a letter—"is the fifth which he hopes will find the recipient as it leaves him

at present—in the pink, and with the dreadful pains in his stummik quite gone."

"Our Doctor has a wonderful bedside manner," remarked the Scotchman. "Did ye no hear the story of him and the lady way back by Hazebrook?"

"That'll do," said the Doctor, rising hurriedly. "She had very bad rheumatism—that poor girl."

"I know she had, Doc," put in the C.O. heartily. "And when I think of the way you eased her sufferings I became lost in admiration over the noble nature of your calling. In the meantime I'd be glad if you'd see one of the men in the Head-quarters Section. From the strange explosive noises he made when I spoke to him before breakfast I gathered by the aid of an interpreter that he had somewhat foolishly placed his complete set of uppers and lowers on a truss of compressed hay, and one of the mules has eaten them."

He strolled to the door on his way to the kitchen in the next house that served as his office.

"You'd better be careful with that rum jar, Jacko. Unless you're pretty certain there's no danger, I'd put a slab of gun-cotton against it where it is, and pop her off. No sense in running any risks carrying it back."

"Right-ho! I'll have a look as soon as I go up. Are you coming, Mac?" He turned to the Scotchman.

"In five minutes, my boy. I have to perform a few blasting operations on my pipe before I start, and then I'm with you." He pulled a battered

veteran out of his pocket, and peered into its noisome bowl.

"Not indoors, man, for heaven's sake!" The Doctor backed hurriedly out of the room. "The last billet you cleaned your pipe in they complained to the Mayor of the village."

"Go away, Doctor, go away. Go and put chloride of lime round the cook-house," Mac was shouting through the window at the receding medico. "And ask yon woman if she has a hairpin. My pipe. . . ." But the Doctor was out of sight.

Ten minutes later the room was empty save for a batman clearing the breakfast table.

. . . . .

Now as a general rule the Sappers do not live in the trenches, but go up there each day and most nights, the remainder of the time being spent in dwellings of dubious sanitation and indubitable draughtiness a mile or so in rear. To each company a certain front is allotted, and it is their joy and pride to maintain this front and the network of trenches behind it spotless and untarnished, what time they minister ceaselessly to the lightest whim of its heroic defenders—usually known by the generic term of P.B.I., or poor bally Infantry. Which, of course, is not what really happens, but one likes to think thus beautifully.

In addition to the Infantry, other people thrust themselves forward in a manner which requires firmness and tact to deal with: gunners require O.P.'s, or observation posts; other gunners require trench

mortar emplacements; dangerous men with machine guns sit up and take notice, and demand concrete and other abominations; while last, but not least, the medical profession demand secret and secure places in which to practise their nefarious trade. Finally, the Ordnance Department is with one always. It was that branch of the great Machine which caused the frown on the face of the Sapper Captain, hitherto alluded to as the O.C., while next door the batman cleared the breakfast table.

"We're six bicycles short, you say, Quartermaster-Sergeant?" he exclaimed irritably, gazing at some papers in front of him, while he filled his pipe.

"Yes, sir; and two more with wheels buckled, and three that free-wheel both ways."

"What d'you mean—free-wheel both ways?"

"The pedals rotate, sir, with great speed, but the bicycle remains motionless." When a man habitually calls an armchair, A chair, arm—Officers, for the use of, one—his conversation is apt to become stilted.

"How were the wheels buckled?" demanded the Captain when he had digested this great thought.

"Two of the officers, sir—playing what I believe they called bicycle polo with a brick and two pick-helves—had—er—a slight mishap."

"When did it happen?"

"Er—after dinner, sir, one night." The N.C.O. looked tactfully out of the window.

The officer did not pursue the topic. "Well, what about these six that have been lost?"

"Completely destroyed by shell-fire," said the C.Q.M.S. firmly. "I have prepared a statement of what happened for your perusal and signature." He handed the officer a written paper and respectfully withdrew a few paces to avoid any semblance of coercion.

"'The six bicycles were placed on the morning of the 10th ult. against the entrance to the R.E. Dump at A.21, C.2.4. It would appear that during the absence of the riders a hostile shell of large calibre fell on the six said bicycles, completely demolishing them, for when the riders returned after the day's work merely a few fragments remained scattered round the shell crater.'"

The Captain read it over slowly, and then, in tones of awe, a murmured "Wonderful" wafted through the office.

"I beg your pardon, sir?" The N.C.O. was again at his side.

"I said wonderful, Quartermaster-Sergeant—quite wonderful. Do you think they'll swallow it?"

"It has been done before, sir." The tone was non-committal. "And one of the six was undoubtedly badly punctured by a stray rifle bullet before we lost it—er—that is, before it was finally destroyed by shell-fire."

"Right." With the air of a man who communes with great destinies, the Captain signed his name. "Anything more?"

"Nothing at present, sir. The question of the consumption of Candles, Tallow dip, Pounds Twenty-

four, stolen from our yard by the 940th Tunnelling Company has come back again with remarks from the Chief Ordnance Officer at the Base—but it will wait until you come back from the trenches."

"I'm glad of that," remarked the Captain, rising. "I'm not feeling very strong this morning, and candles, tallow dip—especially lbs. 24 of them—would cause a relapse. Orderly"—he strolled to the door—"my bicycle, please."

A few minutes later he was riding slowly down the road towards the place where there was "a war on." A cool mist hung over the fields on each side of him, and in the early morning stray cobwebs glistening with moisture brushed lightly across his face.

"*B'jour, monsieur.*" A woman standing in the door of a roadside *estaminet* greeted him as he passed —a woman undisturbed by the guns that at times roared close by; a woman whose house was one concentrated draught, which whistled through what had once been walls and now were holes held together by odd bricks.

He returned the greeting and rode on, while once again the comparison—never far absent from those who live "within range"—came into his mind: the comparison between England and France—between the country which has only learned of war through its soldiers, and the country whose women and children have learned of it first hand, even unto death. All was absolutely silent—the peace and glory of a summer's morning hung over everything,

while the smell of the wet clover came faintly to his nostrils. A military policeman at the corner saluted smartly, while a small boy in a little cart drawn by three straining dogs raced him blithely up the village street. At the end of the battered houses still occupied by their owners, and the temporary abode of half a battalion of infantry resting from a spell in the trenches, progression by bicycle became a little harder. Great branches lay across the road, and pits torn out of the *pavé* by bursting shells made steering a trifle intricate; while occasionally one of the many signal wires which had slipped during the night and was hanging low above his head, scraped the top of his steel helmet.

Once more the familiar "*B'jour, monsieur*"—this time from an old dame who sat day in day out in a corner under a wall selling chocolate. Just above her head, so that by raising her arm she could have touched it, the nose of a "dud" German shell poked out from the brickwork.

Ruin, desolation—and shrouding it all the cool damp mist of seven o'clock in July.

"The very man!" A voice hailed him from behind, and a gunner subaltern materialised. "Are you going up the line?"

"I am—at once." The Sapper placed his bicycle against a heap of sandbags. "What does my dear one desire?

"The accursed Hun placed two large obuses into the Ritz yesterday afternoon. What do you propose

to do about it ?" They were strolling slowly through the sopping grass.

"Nothing—if I can possibly avoid it," answered the Sapper firmly. "You select for an O.P. the most prominent house in the locality—put a signaller on the top of it with a large flag—wait till midday, when the sun is at its brightest, and then send a message back that the bully beef is bad. You——"

"Laddie," interrupted the gunner, "desist. All that you say is true and more—but we must stick to the Ritz, if we can. It commands a soul-inspiring view of the trenches behind that new crater in a way we can't get from anywhere else. What I want you to do is to cover the cellar with boards. Yesterday the second shell knocked two men insensible, and they fell backwards into it. As they nearly drowned, it will be obvious, even to your intelligence, that it contains—amongst other things—water. Moreover, the water is deep, and stinketh. If, therefore, my brainy *confrère*, you will authorise me to draw planks twelve, I myself will cover yon hole with my own fair hands. The cadaverous gentleman at your store, whose face has been passed over by some heavy body, proved both unsympathetic and suspicious this morning when I asked him for them. Wherefore, if you will sign——" He held out a book to the Sapper.

"'Please issue bearer with twelve planks 9 inch by 2 inch; length, 6 feet.'" The Sapper glanced at the page and signed. "There you are, James. Tell him to get them cut for you."

"I was going to, dearie. How marvellously your

brain grasps the importance of these trifling details! Are you passing the Ritz by any chance? If so, tell my warriors to come down to the Store."

"Aren't you coming up?"

"No—it's too light. I have to be careful whom I'm seen with." He turned back and was quickly lost in the white mist—though for some time afterwards the faint strains of musical items selected from *The Bing Boys* followed the Sapper as he walked on.

Occasional voices came mysteriously from apparently nowhere, as a party of men went up one of the deep communication trenches close by him—a trench invisible in summer until you actually stood over it, for the long rank grass hid everything: grass splashed with the red of great masses of poppies, and the white of the daisies, with odd little patches of blue cornflowers and borage, and buttercups glinting yellow. Just rank luxuriant vegetation, run wild—untouched for more than a year.

Suddenly out of the mist there loomed the Ritz—the name of the broken-down, shell-battered house which served his late companion as an O.P. The Sapper gave the message as requested, and stepped down three stairs into the communication trench, which passed close under one of the crumbling walls. There was no necessity, as far as safety was concerned, to get into the trench for several hundred yards—the mist effectually prevented any chance of being seen from the German lines half a mile farther on.

But he was mindful to see the condition of the trench—whether the sides were crumbling, and whether the floor was suitably provided with trench-boards and bricks. Twisting, winding with the poppies and the weeds meeting over his head, and the water brushing off them against his face and coat, he walked slowly on. Seven feet deep, perhaps three feet wide, it might have been a sunken Devonshire lane in model, and a faint red tinge in the soil helped the illusion.

Stale as it all was, unprofitable and a weariness to the flesh as it had all become, the strangeness of it still struck him at times. He wondered lazily what the people he knew at home would think if they were following him at that moment on a tour of inspection. Especially his Uncle John. Uncle John was something in the City, and looked it. He lived near Ascot, and nightly slept with a gas-mask beside his bed. He could imagine Uncle John trembling audibly in that quiet model lane, and assuring his faithful wife of his ability to protect her. He laughed at the picture in his mind, and then with a slight frown stopped.

The trench bent sharply to the right, and almost subconsciously he noticed a hole framed in thick wood, half filled in, in the wall in front of him. The top had broken. He bent and peered through it. It went right through the wall in front, and beyond, the same deep communication trench could be seen stretching away. Just a loophole placed in a traverse through which a rifle could

be fired along a straight thirty yards of trench, if the Germans ever got in. But to fire a rifle to any purpose the loop-hole must not be broken, and so the Sapper made a note before resuming his stroll.

Rounding a bend, a big white board at a cross-roads confronted him. It advertised two or three salient facts written in large black letters. It appeared that by turning to the right one would ultimately reach Leicester Square and an aid post, to say nothing of the Charing Cross Road, which was a down trench. By turning to the left, on the contrary, one would reach Regent Street and a pump. It also stated that the name of our wanderer's present route was the Haymarket, and further affirmed that it was an up trench. For it will be plain to all that, where a trench is but three feet wide, it is essential not to have men going both ways in it—and further, it will also be plain why the aid posts occur in the down ones.

A further interesting and momentous piece of information was imparted from another board, to the effect that the name of the trench by which one could reach the pump on one hand and the aid post on the other was Piccadilly, and that it constituted the reserve line of the position.

In other words, it was not merely a communication trench, but was recessed and traversed like a fire trench. In very fact, it was a fire trench—the third of the system. In front was the support line, known as Pall Mall, and in front of that, again, the firing line, whither later the Sapper proposed to wend his

way. He wanted to gaze on "the rum jar reputed to be filled with explosive." But in the meantime there was the question of the pump—the ever-present question which is associated with all pumps. To work or not to work, and the answer is generally in the negative.

He turned to the left down Piccadilly, wondering what particular ailment had attacked this specimen of the breed, and had caused the Adjutant of the battalion to write winged words anent it. The aspect of the trench had changed; no longer did the red, white, and blue of the tangled wild flowers meet over his head, but grey and drab the sandbag walls rose on each side of him. Occasionally the mouth of a dug-out yawned in the front of the trench, a dark passage cased in with timber, sloping steeply down to the cave below. Voices, and sometimes snores, came drowsily up from the bottom, where odd bunches of the South Loamshires for a space existed beautifully.

"Hullo, old man—how's life?" He rounded a traverse to find an officer of the battalion lathering his chin for his morning shave. A cracked mirror was scotched up between two sandbags, and a small indiarubber basin leaked stealthily on the firing step.

"So-so! That bally pump of yours won't work again, or so the cook says. Jenkins, pass the word along for Smithson. He is the cook, and will tell you the whole sordid story."

"Quiet night?" The Sapper sat down and refilled his pipe.

"Fairly. They caught one of our fellows in the entrance to his dug-out up in the front line with an aerial dart about seven o'clock. Landed just at the entrance. Blew the top of his head off. Good boy, too—just been given his stripe. Oh, Smithson!—tell the Engineer officer about that pump. Confound!—I've shaved a mosquito bite!"

The cook—a veteran of many years—looked at the placidly smoking Sapper and cleared his throat. On any subject he was an artist; on pumps and the deficiencies of Ally Sloper's Cavalry—as the A.S.C. is vulgarly known—he was a genius.

"Well, sir, it's like this 'ere. That there pump is a funny kind o' pump. Sometimes it gives you water and sometimes it don't."

"You surprise me," murmured the Sapper.

"Now, if I might be so bold, sir, I would suggest that another well be sunk, sir—starting fresh-like from the beginning. Then I could keep my heye on it, and see that no one wasn't a-monkeying with it. As it is, wot with the stuff we're a-getting and the shortage of tea and the distance I 'ave to go for water, and——"

"Well, what do you expect?" A bitter voice from round the traverse rudely interrupted the discourse. "We make pumps to pump water—not dead rats. Wasting my time, that's what it is. Where 'ave I put it? In that there perisher Smithson's dug-out, and 'e can 'ave it for his dinner." The

plumber previously sent up on receipt of the Adjutant's note came round the corner, and, seeing his officer, stopped and saluted.

"That there pump's all right, sir. There was a dead rat in it. They *will* leave the cover off the well." He perceived the horrified Smithson, and fixed him with the frozen eye.

"Right. Then you can rejoin your section." The Sapper rose, the plumber departed, the cook faded away, and for a space there was silence.

"Damn that fellow Smithson—he's the limit." The Infantry Officer laughed. "I'll rend him for this."

"Sometimes it gives you water, and sometimes it don't," remarked the Sapper pensively. "Last time it was a sock. Bye-bye. I hope he'll enjoy his dinner."

He followed the plumber back along Piccadilly, composing in his mind a suitable answer to the message of despair from the Adjutant.

"With ref. to your min. of yesterday I would suggest that a larger flow of somewhat purer water would be available if the practice of inserting deceased rodents in the delivery pipe was discontinued forthwith. I am fully alive to the fact that what the eye does not see the heart does not grieve about, and I realise that, viewed from that standpoint only, the grave of the little animal in question could not well be improved on. I also realise that it adds that flavour to the tea which is so sought after by the true connoisseur. But, desiring to view the matter

from the clearer vantage point of an unbiassed onlooker, I venture to suggest——"

His meditations were interrupted by a procession of gunners each carrying on his shoulder an unpleasant-looking object which resembled a gigantic dumb-bell with only one blob on the end—a huge spherical cannon-ball on a steel stalk. They were coming from Leicester Square, and he met them just as they turned up the Haymarket. Waiting until they had all gone by, he followed on in the rear of the party, which suddenly turned sharp to the left, and disappeared into the bowels of the earth.

"No. 7," murmured the Sapper to himself. "I wonder if the officer is new?" He turned to a bombardier standing at the entrance to the passage. "Is your officer here?"

"He's down below, sir." The man drew to one side, and the Sapper passed up a narrow deep trench and went "down below" to the trench-mortar emplacement, a cave hewn out of the ground much on the principle of an ordinary dug-out. But there were certain great differences; for half the roof had been removed, and through the hole thus formed streamed in the early morning sun. A screen of rabbit wire covered with bits of grass, lying horizontally over the open hole when the gun was not firing, helped to conceal it from the prying eyes of Hun aeroplanes. Let into the ground and mounted and clamped to a stand was the mortar itself—while beside it sat a very young gunner officer, much in the attitude of a mother beside her firstborn. He was obviously new

to the game, and the Sapper surveyed him with indulgent eye.

"Good morning." The Gunner looked up quickly. "I'm the Sapper Officer on this bit of line. You've just come in, haven't you?"

"Yes, early this morning. Everything seems very quiet here."

"From four till eight or nine it's always peaceful. But I don't know that you'll find this spot very quiet once you start pooping off. This particular emplacement was spotted some two months ago by the wily Hun, and he got some direct hits on it with small stuff. Since then it hasn't been used. There are lots of others, you know."

"I was ordered to come to this one," answered the boy doubtfully.

"Right-oh! my dear fellow—it's your funeral. I thought I'd just let you know. Are you letting drive this morning?"

"Yes—as soon as I get the order to fire."

The boy was keen as mustard, and, as I have said, very young—just another infant. He had not long to wait, for hardly were the words out of his mouth when a sergeant came in.

"Captain's compliments, sir, and will you fire two rounds at G. 10 C. 5 4?"

Rapidly and without confusion the men did their appointed jobs; the great stalk slithered down the gun, the bomb—big as a football—filled with high explosive was fixed with a detonator, the lanyard to fire the charge was adjusted. Then every one cleared

out of the emplacement, while the Sapper took his stand in the trench outside.

"Let her rip." The lanyard was pulled, and with a muffled crack the huge cannon-ball rose into the air, its steel stalk swaying behind it. Plainly visible, it reached its highest point, and still wobbling drunkenly went swishing down on to G. 10 C. 5 4— or thereabouts. A roar and a great column of black smoke rose from the German lines.

Almost before the report had died away, the gun was sponged out, and another inebriated monster departed on its mission. But the Sapper was already some way up the Haymarket. It was not his first view of a trench-mortar firing.

A vicious crack from a rifle now and then broke the stillness, and proclaimed that the sun was clearing away the morning mist, and that rest-time was nearly over; while the sudden rattle of a machine gun close by him, indulging in a little indirect fire at a well-known Hun gathering place a thousand yards or so behind their lines, disturbed a covey of partridges, which rose with an angry whirring of wings. Then came four of those unmistakable faint muffled bursts from high above his head, which betokened an aeroplane's morning gallop; and even as he automatically jerked his head skywards, with a swishing noise something buried itself in the earth not far away. It is well to remember that even Archibald's offspring obey the laws of gravity, and shells from an anti-aircraft gun, burst they never so high, descend sooner or later in the shape of

jagged fragments—somewhere. And if the somewhere is your face, upturned to see the fun . . . !

The Sapper, with the remembrance fresh in his mind of a pal looking up in just such a way a week before, quickly presented the top of his tin hat to the skies, and all that might descend from them. There had been that same swishing all round them as they stood watching some close shooting at one of our own planes. He recalled the moment when he cried suddenly—" Jove ! they've got him ! " He had turned as he spoke to see the officer with him, slipping sideways, knees crumpling, body sagging. " Good God ! old man, what is it ? " The question was involuntary, for as he caught the limp figure—he knew.

The plane was all right : the German shells had not got *it*; but a piece of shrapnel, the size of a match-box, had passed through that officer's eye, and entered his brain. He had laid him on the firing-step, and covered his head—or what was left of it. . . .

He reached Pall Mall, to be once again confronted with a large white notice board. To the right were Boyaux 93 and 94—to the left, 91 and 90. Straight on to the front, 92 led to the firing line. With his ultimate destination Vesuvius crater and the rum jar in view, he turned to the right, and walked along the support trench. It was much the same as Piccadilly : only being one degree nearer the front, it was one degree more warlike. Boxes of bombs

everywhere; stands for rifles on the firing-step, which held them rigidly when they fired rifle grenades; and every now and then a row of grey-painted rockets with a red top, which in case of emergency send up the coloured flares that give the S.O.S. signals to those behind. Also men: men who slept and ate and shaved and wrote and got bored. A poor show is trench warfare!

"Look out, sir. They've knocked it in just round the corner last night with trench mortars." A sergeant of the South Loamshires was speaking. "Having a go at Laburnum Cottage, I'm thinking."

"What, that sniper's post? Have you been using it?"

"One of our men in there now, sir. He saw an Allemand go to ground in his dug-out half an hour ago through the mist, and he reckons he ought to finish breakfast soon, and come out again."

The Sapper crawled on his stomach over the *débris* that blocked the trench, and stopped at the entrance to Laburnum Cottage, officially known as Sniper's Post No. 4. In a little recess pushed out to the front of the trench, covered in with corrugated iron and surrounded by sandbags, sprawled the motionless figure of a Lance-Corporal. With his eye glued to his telescopic sight and his finger on the trigger of his rifle, he seemed hardly to be breathing. Suddenly he gave a slight grunt, and the next instant, with a sharp crack, the rifle fired.

"Get him?" asked the Sapper.

"Dunno, sir," answered the sniper, his eye still

fixed to the telescope. "Three 'undred yards, and 'e ducked like 'ell. It wasn't far off 'is nibs, but one can't tell for sure." He got down and stretched himself. "I've waited 'alf an 'our for the perisher, too, without no breakfast." He grinned and scrambled over the broken-down trench to remedy the latter deficiency, while once more the Sapper walked on. No need with this particular regiment to suggest rebuilding the broken-in trench; it would be done automatically—which cannot be said of them all.

At last he reached Boyau 94, and turned up towards the firing-line. Twenty yards from the turn a mass of barbed wire crossed the trench above his head, the barbed wire which ran in front of the support line. For it is not only the fire-trench that is wired—each line behind is plentifully supplied with this beautiful vegetable growth.

The mist had cleared away, and the morning sun was blazing down from a cloudless sky, as he reached the front trench. Just to his left a monstrous pair of bellows, slowly heaving up and down under the ministrations of two pessimistic miners, sent a little of God's fresh air down to the men in the mine-shafts underneath. The moles were there—the moles who scratched and scraped stolidly, at the end of their gallery thirty or forty yards in front, deep down under the earth in No Man's Land.

A steady stream of sandbags filled with the result of their labours came up the shaft down which the pipe from the bellows stretched into the darkness—

sandbags which must be taken somewhere and emptied, or used to revet a bit of trench which needed repair.

To right and left there stretched the fire-trench —twisting and turning, traversed and recessed— just one small bit of the edge of British land. A hundred yards away, a similar line stretched right and left, where other pessimistic miners ministered to other monstrous bellows, and Piccadilly was known as Unter den Linden. The strange stagnation of it all!

Look through the periscope at the country in front. Not a sign of life in the torn-up crusted earth; not a movement between the two long lines of wire. A few poppies here and there, and at one point a motionless grey-green lump close to the farther wire. Impossible to tell exactly what it is from the periscope—the range is too far. But, in No Man's Land, such strange grey—and khaki— lumps may often be seen. The night, a wiring party, perhaps a little raid or an officer's patrol, and—discovery. You cannot always get your dead back to the trench, and the laws that govern No Man's Land savour of the primitive. . . .

The Sapper watched the phlegmatic bellows-heaver for a few moments curiously. His stoical indifference to any one or anything save the job in hand, the wonderful accuracy with which he spat from time to time, the appalling fumes from his short clay pipe, all tended to make of him an interesting study. Supremely apathetic to friend or foe,

Generals or Huns, he did his shift without comment and, as far as could be seen, without thought.

"Where are you putting the earth?" asked the Sapper after watching for a while.

"Round corner, in a 'ole." The speaker pointed with his pipe, and the subject dropped.

The officer turned away smiling slightly, and decided on the inspection of the rum jar. The answer was clear and succinct, even if not couched in the language of the old army discipline. He inspected the hole, and, finding it was at the back of the trench, in a crater that was formed nightly by German *minenwerfer*, and that more earth there not only would not block the trench but, *mirabile dicta*, would be an actual advantage, he passed on and shortly came to a passage leading out of the front of the trench.

The passage was labelled Sap No. 130, and presented exactly the same appearance as the boyaux which ran out of the support line to the front trench. Only when one got into it did the difference become apparent, for whereas the boyaux had continued until finally opening into a new trench, the sap was a cul-de-sac, and finished abruptly in a little covered-in recess built into a miniature mountain of newly-thrown-up earth. And this great, tumbled mass of soil was the near lip of Vesuvius crater—blown up half way between the two front lines.

Over the top of the mountain there was no passage. A man standing or crawling there in daytime would have been in full view of German snipers at a range

of forty yards; while had he accomplished it in safety, he would have slithered down the farther side into a great cavity shaped like an egg-cup, at the bottom of which a pool of dirty, stagnant water was slowly forming. Moreover, if we imagine the man continuing his journey and climbing up the other side, he would run the gauntlet of the English snipers as he topped the farther lip, before reaching the German sap which ran out in just such a similar cul-de-sac to the one already described.

Thus are craters consolidated; each side holds the lip nearest to them, and hurls curses and bombs at his opponents on the other. The distance between the sapheads is perhaps twenty or twenty-five yards, instead of the hundred odd of the parent fire-trenches; and any closer acquaintanceship is barred by the egg-cup crater, which stretches between them.

"Keep down, sir—well down. Lot of sniping to-day." A sergeant of the South Loamshires whispered hoarsely to the Sapper as he reached the end of the sap—it is etiquette to whisper in a sap. Three men inside the recess were drinking tea with the calmness born of long custom, while lying on his side, with a periscope to his eye, was Jackson, the subaltern.

"Anything fresh, Jacko?" muttered the Sapper, crouching down beside him.

"Yes—I think they're coming closer with their left sap round the crater. Their periscope seems to be nearer than it was yesterday."

"Let's have a look." The two changed position,

and the Captain turned the periscope gently round until he got the exact direction. Absolute stillness brooded over the ground he could see; a few rough strands of wire straggled about, and disappeared into the great mound of earth that formed the *débris* of the crater.

There were the enemies' trenches—a railway embankment behind them with a derelict row of trucks—a great chimney, gaunt and desolate, with the buildings at its foot in ruins. But it was not on these old friends that he was concentrating; his target was the bit of ground just in front of him that lay close to the thrown-up earth of Vesuvius, along which the German sap was reputed to be creeping nearer.

At last he got what he wanted. Close at hand, perhaps twenty yards away, there stuck up out of the ground a motionless stick with something on the end—the German's periscope. Now it is reputed to be a fact by several people of apparent truthfulness that it is possible, in circumstances such as these, for each watcher to see the other man's eyes reflected from the mirrors of the periscopes; and it is an undoubted fact that the laws which govern the refraction of light would allow of this phenomenon. Personally, I am glad to say I have never seen a German's eye through a periscope; but then personally I am inclined to doubt if any one has. It must be quite dreadful to see a thing like a poached egg regarding you balefully from the top of a stick a few yards away.

At last the Sapper got up. "He's no nearer, Jacko. What do you think, sergeant ?"

"I don't think they were working last night, sir," one of the tea-drinkers answered.

"There was a party of 'em out, and we bunged some bombs. We 'eard 'em padding the 'oof back."

"Been pretty quiet, then ?"

"Except for that there rum jar, sir," answered the sergeant. "We thought we was napoo [1] when we 'eard that little bundle of fun a-coming."

"Have you seen it, Jacko ?"

"Yes, it rolled into the sap, and I've had it put into the fire-trench. I'm taking it back to blow it up. I think it's a percussion fuse, but it seems fairly safe. I've sent for a stretcher to carry it on."

"Let's go and have a look at it."

The two officers walked down the sap and back into the trench, and started to investigate with a professional eye the object lying on the fire-step. Apparently of steel, and painted a dull grey, it looked harmless enough—but all those little love offerings of the Hun are treated with respect. About the size of an ordinary rum jar, with a fuse of sorts in place

[1] *Special Note to Lovers of Etymology.*

Il n'y en a plus. There is no more. French phrase signifying complete absence of. Largely heard in estaminets near closing time.

Naploo.—Original pure English phrase signifying the perisher has run out of beer.

Napoo.—Vulgar and bastardised shortening of original pure English phrase. Has now been added to B.E.F. dictionary, and is used to imply that a man, thing, person, animal, or what not, is "finished."

of a neck, it was at the time an unknown brand of abomination, to them at any rate.

"It differs only in appearance, I fear," remarked the Captain, after inspecting it gingerly, "from other presents they give us. Its object is undoubtedly nefarious. Where do you propose to blow it up?"

"In that little quarry near the Ritz. Will that do all right?"

"Most excellently." With a smile he looked at his watch. "Just set your watch by mine, Jacko —and poop it off at 10.5 ak emma. Do you take me?"

The other looked puzzled for a moment; then his face cleared.

"I'd forgotten for the moment that Centre Battalion Head-quarters was not far from the quarry," he grinned. "Sir—I take you."

"My dear boy, the day is hot, and the Pumpkin is fat, and the flies are glutinous. He doesn't want to see the trenches any more than I do—and one's mission in life is to anticipate the wishes of the great."

It was just as he finished speaking that from up the line in the direction of the Haymarket there came four dull, vicious cracks in succession, and some clouds of black smoke drifted slowly over his head.

"Just about No. 7 T.M. emplacement," he muttered to himself. "I hope to heavens . . ."

"Put it on the stretcher carefully, boys." His subaltern was speaking to the two men who had

arrived with a stretcher. "Have you got the slab of gun-cotton?"

"Corporal 'Amick 'as gone to get it at the store, sir. He's a-going to meet us at the quarry."

"Right-ho! Walk march."

The calvacade departed, and the Captain resumed his morning walk, while his thoughts wandered to the beer which is cold and light yellow. For many weary months had he taken a similar constitutional daily; not always in the same place, true; but variety is hard to find in the actual trenches themselves. It is the country behind that makes the difference.

Time was when communication trenches existed only in the fertile brain of those who were never called upon to use them; but that time has passed long since. Time was when the thin, tired breaking line of men who fought the Prussian Guard at Ypres in 1914—and beat them—had hard work to find the fire-trenches, let alone the communication ones; when a daily supervision was a nerve-shattering nightly crawl, and dug-outs were shell-holes covered with a leaking mackintosh. It was then that men stood for three weeks on end in an icy composition of water and slime, and if by chance they did get a relief for a night, merely clambered out over the back, and squelched wearily over the open ground with bullets pinging past them from the Germans a few score yards away.

But now there are trenches in canal banks where dead things drift slowly by, and trenches in railway

embankments where the rails are red with rust and the sleepers green with rot; there are trenches in the chalk, good and deep, which stand well, and trenches in the slush and slime which never stand at all; there are trenches where the smell of the long grass comes sweetly on the west wind, and trenches where the stench of death comes nauseous on the east. And one and all are they damnable, for ever accursed . . .

But the country behind—ah! there's where the difference comes. You may have the dead flat of pastoral Flanders, the little woods, the plough, the dykes of Ypres and Boesinghe; you may have the slag-heaps and smoking chimneys of La Bassée and Loos; you may have the gently undulating country of Albert and the Somme. Each bears the marks of the German beast—and, like their inhabitants, they show those marks differently. Ypres and the North, apathetic, seemingly lifeless; the mining districts, grim and dour; the rolling plains still, in spite of all, cheerful and smiling. But underlying them all—deep implacable determination, a grand national hatred of the Power who has done this thing. . . .

He turned out of the Old Kent Road into a siding which harboured the dug-outs of the Centre Battalion.

"Is the General here yet, Murdock?" A tall sergeant of the regiment—an old friend of his—flattened himself against the side of the trench to let him pass.

"Yes, sir." The sergeant's face was expression-

less, though his eyes twinkled. "I think, sir, as 'ow the General is feeling the 'eat. 'E seems worried. 'E's been trying to telephone."

The Sapper, with a suppressed chuckle, went down some steps into a spacious dug-out. The darkness made him temporarily blind, so he saluted and stood still just inside the doorway.

"Damn you, don't blow at me! What's that fool blowin' down the thing for? I *have* pressed a button—confound you!—and rung the bell twice. No—I didn't ring off; somebody blew at me, and the machine fell on the floor."

"The General is trying to get through to his château." A voice full of unholy joy whispered in the Sapper's ear, and that worthy, whose eyes had got accustomed to the gloom, recognised the Adjutant.

"I gathered that something of the sort was occurring," he whispered back.

But the General was at it again. "Who are you—the R.T.O.? Well, ring off. Exchange. Exchange. It is the Divisional General speaking. I want my head-quarters. I say, I want my—oh, don't twitter, and the bally thing's singin' now! First it blows and then it sings. Good God! what's that?"

A deafening explosion shook the dug-out, and a shower of earth and stones rained down in the trench outside.

"They're very active this morning, sir," said the Sapper, stepping forward. "Lot of rum jars and things coming over."

"Are you the Sapper officer? Good morning.

I wish you'd get this accursed instrument to work."

"There may be a line broken," he remarked tactfully.

"Well—I shall have to go back; I can't hear a word. The thing does nothin' but squeak. Now it's purring like a cat. I hate cats. Most annoyin'. I wanted to come round the front line this morning."

"In very good condition, sir; I've just been all round it. Mighty hot up there, General—and swarms of flies."

"And they're puttin' over some stuff, you say?"

"Yes, sir—quite a lot."

"Hum! Well, of course, I fully intended to come round—but, dash it all, I must get back. Can't hear a word the fellow says. Does nothing but play tunes." The Pumpkin rose and stalked to the door. "Well, I'll come round another morning, my boy. I wonder, by Jove! if that last one was meant for this head-quarters? Devilish near, you know." He walked up the stairs, followed by his staff officer. "Good mornin'—mind you see about that telephone. Cursed thing blows."

"Dear old Pumpkin," murmured the Adjutant as his steps died away. "He's a topper. His figure's against him, but he's got the heart of a lion."

"He has," answered the Sapper, preparing to follow his footsteps. "And the men would do anything for him."

"What price that rum jar I sent in a bird about?"

"That was the last explosion you heard," laughed

the Sapper. "I wasn't leaving anything to chance. I am going to go and drink beer—iced beer, in long glasses. *Toujours à toi.*"

He was gone, leaving the Adjutant staring.

A few moments later he clambered out of the trench, and struck out for the crumbling church that betokened a road and the near presence of his bicycle.

. . . . .

A day of peace—yes, as things go, a day of perfect peace. Away down South things were moving; this was stagnation. And yet—well, it was at dinner that night . . .

"For the fourteenth night in succession I rise to a point of order." The Doctor was speaking. "Why is the lady with the butterfly on her back pushed away into one corner, and that horrible woman with the green wig accorded the place of honour?"

I would hurriedly state that the Doctor's remarks were anent two pictures which are, I believe, occasionally to be found in officers' messes in the B.E.F.—pictures of a Parisian flavour as befits the Entente—pictures which—at any rate they are well known to many, and I will not specify further.

"Yes, the lady with the gween wig is dweadful." The boy sipped his port.

"Infant, I'm shocked at you. The depravity of these children nowadays . . ."

An orderly came into the room with an envelope, which he handed to the Captain.

The C.O. spread out the flimsy paper and frowned slightly as he read the message.

"T.M. Emp. No. 7, completely wrecked by a direct hit 9.30 a.m. this morning, A.A.A. Please inspect and report, A.A.A., C.R.E., 140th Division."

"Delayed as usual," grunted the Scotchman. "I was there just after it happened, and reported it to the O.C. Trench Mortars. Did you not hear, sir, for it's useless repairing it? That position is too well known."

"Were there any casualties?" The Sapper Captain's voice was quiet.

"Aye. The poor lad that was crooning over his gun when I saw him this morning, like a cat over her undrowned kitten, just disappeared."

"What d'you mean, Mac?"

"It was one of the big ones, and it came right through the wire on top of him." The gruff voice was soft. "Poor bairn!"

II

OVER THE TOP

"On the afternoon of the 21st we gained a small local success. Our line was advanced on a front of six hundred yards, over an average depth of a quarter of a mile. All the ground gained was successfully consolidated. Up to date eighty-six unwounded prisoners have passed through the corps cage, of whom three are officers."

Thus ran the brief official notice so tersely given in the "Intelligence Summary," known to the ribald as "Comic Cuts"; later it will appear even more tersely in the daily communiqué which delights the matutinal kipper and twin eggs of England. It's all so simple; it all sounds such a ridiculously easy matter to those who read. Map maniacs stab inaccurate maps with pins; a few amateur strategists discourse at length, and with incredible ignorance, on the bearing it—and countless other similar operations—will have on the main issue. And the vast majority remark gloomily to the other members of the breakfast table that there is nothing in the paper as usual. Nothing, my friend! I wonder. . . .

This is not a story; there is no plot; it is just

what happens every day somewhere or other in the land of glutinous, stinking mud, where the soles are pulled off a man's boots when he walks and horses go in up to their bellies ; where one steers a precarious and slippery course on the narrow necks of earth that separate shell holes, and huddled things stare up at the sky with unseeing eyes. They went " over the top " themselves—ten days ago—in just such another local success. Nothing, my friend ! Perhaps you're right ; it's mainly a sense of proportion that is needed in war, as in other things. . . .

" Good morning, dear old soul." The machine-gun officer emerged from a watery hole of doubtful aspect, covered with a dented sheet of corrugated iron and a flattened-out biscuit tin—the hole that is, not the officer. " We have slept well, thank you ; and the wife and family are flourishing. Moreover—you're late."

The Sapper regarded him pessimistically through the chilly mist of an October dawn. " Entirely owing to my new and expensive waders being plucked from my feet with a sucking noise. A section of haggard men are now engaged in salvage operations. Shall we process ? "

" We shall—in one sweet moment, not before. Sweet, brave heart, because——" He put his head round the corner. " Jones—the raspberry wine—*toute suite.* Just a hollow tooth full, and we will gambol like young lambs the whole long weary way."

" It is well," remarked the Sapper, returning the

empty mug to the soldier servant. "Personally I like it burnt at night, with a noggin of port. You put it in a mug, add three spoonfuls of sugar, set light to it, and let it burn for seven minutes. Then add some port, and drink hot. Man, you can lead an army corps . . ." His voice died away as the two officers departed on their three-mile squelch to the front line, and the unshaven Jones gazed after them admiringly.

"A hartist!" he murmured admiringly, "a plurry hartist. Personally, the rasberry juice, any old 'ow for me." He disappeared from view, and further disclosures would be tactless. . . .

And so we lift the curtain on the dawn of the 21st. Doubtless the setting is frivolous, but it has served to introduce two of the supers who go to make up the final scene. In the portion of the front line for which they were bound there lay the battalion which was cast for the principal part, and it is the prerogative of stars to have their entrance led up to. . . .

The mist hung thick over the shell-torn ground as the two officers walked on. In places stretches of half-demolished wire and blown-in trenches showed where the Germans had put up a fight. Stray graves, ours and theirs, were dotted about promiscuously, and little heaps of dirty and caked equipment showed that salvage work was in progress. Away to the left a few crumbling walls and shattered trees marked a one-time prosperous agricultural village, from which with great regularity there came the sighing drone of a German crump followed by a

column of black smoke and a shower of bricks and débris. But the place was dead; its inhabitants gone — God knows where. And soldiers: well, soldiers have a rooted dislike to dead villages near the trenches.

A strange squat object loomed suddenly into sight —a well-known landmark to those who wandered daily behind the lines. Derelict, motionless, it lay on a sunken road, completely blocking it; and the sunken road was heavy with the stench of death. It is not good for the Hun to take liberties with a tank, even if it is temporarily *hors-de-combat*.

A man limping wearily, his head bandaged, his face unshaved, his khaki coated with half-dry mud, plodded heavily towards them.

"Can you tell me the way to the dressing-station, sir?" He had stopped and, swaying slightly, stood in front of the two officers.

"Straight on, lad. You'll find it somewhere back there." The machine-gun officer pointed vaguely into the mist. "About half a mile."

"You ain't got a drop of water, 'ave you, sir? The water party got lost last night, and we've only had about a teacupful this last twenty-four hours."

But when going up to visit the trenches water-bottles are a useless encumbrance, and, with a tired sigh, the wounded Tommy resumed his thirsty way in the direction of the dressing-station.

"Cooked, poor devil," remarked the Sapper, as he disappeared. "Pretty nearly finished."

"But he'll be his mother's own bright boy again

when he gets his nose inside that aid post. We go left here, I think."

They paused for a moment to get their bearings—a matter of some importance and no little difficulty.

It may seem an easy thing to walk up to the trenches. One goes on, and ultimately one arrives, the casual reader will surmise. And with luck the casual reader will be right. But there are certain small points which may have escaped his ken and which render the task of reaching the front line a trifle harder than walking to the club for lunch.

In the first place the aspect of the ground is not of that cheerful and varied type which has inspired so many gifted landscape painters. No trees and little rivers, no cottages and flowering paths delight one's eye. It is impossible to say: "Take the turn to the left after passing the cactus bush, and keep straight on till you come to the asparagus bed; and then you'll see the front trench on your right."

The local cactus bush or its equivalent is hurled into space twice daily, thereby largely interfering with its use as a landmark. The local asparagus bed or *its* equivalent differs only from the remainder of the ground in the fact that a mule passed peacefully away on it some weeks previously. And one day even that difference vanished. The mule passed away again—in small fragments.

Even the front trenches where they exist have a variegated career. At certain periods quite a large proportion of them are in the air at the same time, in company with the village just behind; and when

they come down again it is more than likely their position will change to the next row of damp and unpleasant holes.

That is the trouble: the whole ground is one huge hole. Holes are the only features of the landscape: big holes, little holes, damp ones, smelly ones; holes occupied and holes to let; holes you fall into and holes you don't—but, holes. Everywhere holes. The cactus bush is a hole; the asparagus bed is a hole; the trenches are holes. The whole country looks like a disease. A large amount of the wandering must perforce be done at night; and should the casual reader still doubt the difficulty of finding one's way, let him imagine three voluntary descents, and as many compulsory ones, into the wet brand of hole; let him further imagine a steady downpour of rain, no sign of a star, and a shrewd suspicion that if he's walked as far as he thinks he has in the right direction he ought to be in the front line; and then let him imagine—holes. Whenever he moves he either negotiates or fails to negotiate—holes. Having, in scrambling out of holes turned round twice he doesn't know which way he's facing; he only knows there are —holes. Toc—toc—toc; the slow tapping of a German machine-gun sounds from the direction he had fondly imagined Battalion Head-quarters to be; the swish of bullets come nearer as the Hun sweeps the ground; a flare goes up, showing—holes. Another compulsory descent; a phut! as a bullet passes over his head, and the swishing passes on. Shortly that swishing will come back, and in the meantime are

there not—holes? But as for the front trench, whither he is bound, the contest is unequal. No man can fight—holes.

A further point which is worthy of remark *en passant* may possibly escape the notice of the uninitiated. It is a well-known fact, and will be vouched for by all who have experienced the Somme, that that part of the ground which is not hole is carried, like the unexpended portion of the day's rations, on the person. Acres of soil have been removed from their original abode and have been carried laboriously to other acres. They have then been brought back again; not by boot only, but by hand, and face, by hair and teeth. It is reported—though I will not vouch for the accuracy of the statement—that on one occasion a relieving battalion completely defeated a small German counter-attack by standing on the parapet and kicking viciously towards the advancing Huns. The enormous mass of soil thus propelled not only crushed the hated foe but effectually buried him. However, that is by the way. We are digressing far from the Sapper and the machine-gun officer who stood by a derelict tank in the damp mist of an October dawn and cogitated on the direction of their particular piece of front line.

"It is amazing," said a voice behind them, "that man can have descended to such a state of congenital idiocy as to do all this to an inoffensive carrot field."

The Brigade-Major, followed by the Brigadier, joined the two officers. Behind them the signal

officer plucked France from his face. And then of a sudden five officers disappeared. A droning roar rose with extreme rapidity to that pitch of loudness that denotes undesirable closeness; a mass of black fumes and flying mud shot up twenty odd yards away; a flight of cockchafers seemed to pass into the distance as the jagged fragments whizzed overhead—and five faces appeared as suddenly from the ground. Holes have their uses at times.

"This sunken road is always hairy," remarked the signal officer—known to his intimates as Sigs—giving the General a hand-up from his particular lair. "It were unwise to linger, sir."

"Another quarter-mile and we hit Essex Trench," remarked the Brigade-Major. "Sally's head-quarters are there." The five officers passed on, squelching loudly, and once again peace and silence reigned in the sunken road. . . .

And now we come to the principal actors in the drama. Crowded in Essex Trench, damp with mist, were the men of the South Loamshires. A few were scribbling notes, and an all-pervading smell of frying bacon permeated the air. One or two, wrapped in great-coats, with a mackintosh sheet over them, still slept peacefully—but the whole regiment was stirring into life. The morning of the day had come. To many it was a new experience; to others it was stale—going over the top. But, new or old, not a man but realised that by evening the roll of the regiment would have many gaps; new or old, not a man but realised that his name might be one of those gaps.

Just the luck of the game ; perhaps nothing, perhaps a Blighty, perhaps . . .

It is well without doubt that the lower the intelligence the less the imagination. To ninety per cent. of these men the situation lost much of its edge ; to the remaining ten the edge was sharpened. What is to be is to be, in war as elsewhere. Fatalism as regards one's own prospects is inevitable ; essential. But fatalism is an unsatisfying creed ; the word " Why ? " is apt to creep into the back of a man's mind, and the word " Why ? " when the intelligence is low, is a dangerous one. For the word " Why ? " can only be satisfactorily answered by the realisation of the bigness of the issue ; by the knowledge that individual effort is imperative if collective success is to be obtained ; by the absolute conviction that no man can be a law unto himself. To the ten per cent. these facts were clear ; but then, to the ten per cent. the " Why ? " was louder. The factor of their composition which said to them " Why ? "—clearly and insistently—even as they lay motionless under their coats or outwardly wrangled for bacon and tea —that very factor supplied the answer.

To the thinkers and dreamers there comes at such times the greater knowledge : the knowledge which lifts them above self and the trivialities of their own lives ; the knowledge that is almost Divine. They appreciate the futility—but they realise the necessity. And in their hearts they laugh sardonically as the shadow of Dream's End clouds the sky. The utter futility of it all—the utter necessity now that futility

has caught the world. Then they realise the bacon is cold—and curse.

To the ninety per cent. it is not so. Not theirs to reason so acutely, not theirs to care so much; to them the two dominant features of this war—death and boredom—appeal with far less force. For both depend so utterly on imagination in their effect on the individual. Death is only awful in anticipation; boredom only an affliction to the keen-witted. So to the ninety, perhaps, the "Why?" does not sound insistently. It is as well, for if the answer is not forthcoming there is danger, as I have said. And one wonders sometimes which class produces the best results for the business in hand—the business of slaughtering Huns. . . . The small one that rises to great heights and sinks to great depths, or the big one, the plodders.

But I have digressed again. It is easy to wander into by-paths when the main road is prosaic, and the study of a body of men before an attack—the men who fear and don't show it, the men who fear and try not to show it, the men who don't care a hang what happens—cannot but grip the observer who has eyes to see. Almost does he forget his own allotted part in the drama; the psychology of the thing is too absorbing. And it can only be realised when seen first hand.

Let us leave them there for the time—that battalion of the South Loamshires. Sally—as the C.O. is generally known—has talked with the Brigadier and the Brigade-Major. He knows that zero hour is

11.30 a.m.; he knows his objective—Suffolk Trench; he knows the strong point at its northern end which the sappers are going to consolidate. The Sapper has found his section subaltern and his section nursing coils of barbed wire and shovels, and has been informed with much blasphemy that the guide had lost his way, and the party had been wandering all night. The machine-gun officer has delivered words of wisdom to various guns' crews—both Lewis and otherwise—who came under his eagle eye at intervals along the trench. Just the prosaic main road; the details are tedious; the actual orders uninteresting. The attack would either succeed or it would fail; the strong point would either be consolidated or it would not. The orders—the details—are necessary adjuncts to the operation; of no more interest than the arrangements for pulling up the fire curtain. Only if the fire curtain sticks, the play is robbed of much of its natural charm to the onlooker.

"Bring me some more breakfast. That walk gives one the devil of a hunger." The Brigadier was back once more in his dug-out, while, outside, the mist had lifted and the autumn sun shone down on a world of mud.

The Brigade-Major was shaving; the Staff Captain—a non-starter in the morning's walk—was demanding corrugated iron from the unmoved Sapper.

"I tell you this roof is a disgrace. Cascades of

water pour through into the soup at dinner. Why don't you do something ? "

" What do you propose I should do, brave heart ? Sit on the roof and catch it ? "

The subject was a complicated one, touching deep problems of supply and demand, to say nothing of carrying parties; so let us leave them to their warfare.

The signal officer was looking wise over something that boomed and buzzed alternately; the machine-gun officer may, or may not, have been enjoying another toothful.

In short, the supers, the stage-managers had departed. The last directions had been given, and the play was due to start in an hour and a quarter. All that could be done for its success had been done by those who were behind; now it was up to the men who sat and sprawled in the mud-holes in front, with the blue smoke of their cigarettes curling upwards and their equipment and rifles stacked beside them.

A desultory bombardment on each side droned stolidly on, while away to the front three British aeroplanes, seemingly come from nowhere, tumbled and looped round two Germans like mosquitoes over a pool. A row of sausage balloons like a barber's rash adorned the sky as far as the eye could see. Just an everyday scene on the Somme, and meanwhile the actors waited.

" Come up to the top. There's ten minutes to go." The Staff Captain and the Sapper—their dispute

settled—strolled amicably to the top of the hill behind the dug-out and produced their field-glasses. Away in front Essex Trench could be seen, and the men inside it, standing to. For them the period of suspense was nearly over—the curtain was just going up.

"One minute." The Sapper snapped his watch to and focussed his glasses. "They're off."

Suddenly from all around, as if touched by a spring, an ear-splitting din leaped into life. In the valley behind them it seemed as if hundreds of tongues of flame were darting and quivering, sprouting from what a moment before was barren ground. The acrid smell of cordite drifted over them, while without cessation there came the solemn boom—boom—boom of the heavier guns way back. Like the *motif* of an opera, the field-guns and light howitzers cracked and snorted, permeating everything with one continuous blast of sound; while the sonorous roar and rumble of the giant pieces behind—slower, as befitted them—completed the mighty orchestra. Neither man could hear the other speak; but then, they were both watching too intently for that.

Hardly had hell been let loose when a line of men arose from Essex Trench and walked steadily to their front. Just ahead of them great clouds of smoke rose belching from the ground: clouds into which they vanished at times, only to reappear a moment later. They were advancing behind a creeping barrage, and advancing with the steadiness of automatic machines.

"Good lads! Good lads!" The Staff Captain's lips framed the words; his voice was inaudible.

Every now and then a man pitched forward and lay still; or muttered a curse as he felt the sting of something in his arm. A section on the left dropped suddenly, only to worm on again by ones and twos, trying to avoid the dreaded toc-toc—slow and menacing—of a German machine-gun. Then the bombers were there. Crouching back, a man would pull the pin out of his bomb, run forward, and hurl it into the trench where the Germans were huddled in groups. And away behind the South Loamshires, on the shell-pocked ground that now boiled and heaved like some monstrous sulphur spring, with thick black and yellow fumes drifting slowly across it, there lay the first fruits of the harvest: a few of the gaps in the evening's roll-call.

On the flank a machine-gun was going, taking them in enfilade. In front, Germans—numbers of Germans—glared snarling at them out of the trench, or whimpered in a corner with arms upraised, as was the nature of the beasts. A non-commissioned officer picked up a bomb and hurled it at the advancing platoon sergeant; only to cry "*Kamerad*" when it failed to explode. . . .

And so the South Loamshires, or such as were left of them, came to their objective; the first part of the play was over. The machine-gunner who had enfiladed them passed in his checks, fighting to the end, brained with the butt of a rifle

Occasionally a wounded man crawled into the trench; a German officer sat sullenly in a corner stanching a gaping hole in his leg. Behind them, towards the Essex Trench, the air was now clearer; the bombardment had moved over the line they had won, and thundered down on the German communications.

"Runner!" A Company Commander stood shakily trying to patch up a wound in his arm. As far as he could tell from a hasty reconnaissance, he was the senior officer present. "Give this to the C.O.: 'Objectives won. Situation on right doubtful. Estimated casualties two hundred.'" He handed the man a slip of paper.

At a steady lope the runner went over the back of the trench, into the barrage of German shrapnel and high explosive. They saw him reach it, stop suddenly, twist round, and slither slowly forward.

"Runner down, sir." A sergeant standing by spoke almost casually.

"Runner!" Once again the officer called; once again a man went off at a jog-trot. They saw him reach his predecessor; stop a moment and bend down. He looked round and shook his head and went steadily on. The luck of the game—that's all. And it's only when one's sitting still—waiting, that one asks "Why?" Ten minutes later he was with the C.O., waiting for the answer to take back.

And so the drama is over; the play has been a success. From the wings the Staff Captain and the Sapper have returned to Brigade Head-quarters.

"Saw 'em getting over the top, sir. Then they got into the smoke and we lost 'em. Like a witches' cauldron."

"We shan't hear anything for two hours." The General thoughtfully knocked the ashes out of his pipe. They were his men who had gone into that witches' cauldron; with them daily he lived and daily died. Their Dream's End was his too. But—a sense of proportion, always. "We might as well have lunch," he remarked casually.

Gradually the bombardment died away, though from time to time the guns burst into sullen mutterings, as though hungry at being baulked of their food.

The same old aeroplanes—or different ones—buzzed busily about; the same old stoical balloons looked more rash-like than ever.

And then suddenly outside the brigade office there was a stir.

A runner had hove in sight, and the signal officer emerged to get his tidings.

"Good," he muttered to himself; "the old man will be pleased." He went into the General's dug-out.

"Message just through, sir, from C.O. South Loamshires: 'Objectives obtained. A. A. A. Situation on right somewhere obscure. A. A. A. Estimated casualties 200 all ranks. A. A. A. Will be consolidated to-night. A. A. A.'"

The "old man" *was* pleased.

And so, on the afternoon of the 21st, we gained

a small local success. We advanced our line on a front of six hundred yards over an average depth of a quarter of a mile, etc., etc.

It wasn't much, my friends at home; but—that runner will run no more, and some eighty odd of that odd two hundred have cooked their last ration of bacon. Their "Why?" is answered.

No, it wasn't much; but it wasn't—nothing.

III

THE MAN-TRAP

SHOULD you, in the course of your wanderings, ever run across Brigadier-General Herbert Firebrace, do not ask him if he knows Percy FitzPercy. The warning is probably quite unnecessary: not knowing FitzP. yourself, the question is hardly likely to occur to you. But I mention it in case. One never knows, and Herbert will not be prejudiced in your favour if you do.

As far as I know, the story of their first—and last—meeting has never yet been told to the world at large. It is a harrowing tale, and it found no place in official *communiqués*. Just one of those regrettable incidents that fade into the limbo of forgotten things, it served as a topic of conversation to certain ribald subalterns, and then it gradually disappeared into obscurity along with Percy FitzPercy. Only it took several months for the topic to fade; Percy beat it in about ten seconds.

Before the war Percy had been, amongst other things, an actor of indifferent calibre; he had helped a barman in Canada, carried a chain for a railroad survey, done a bit of rubber-planting, and written

poetry. He was, in fact, a man of many parts, and cultivated a frivolous demeanour and an eyeglass. Unkind acquaintances described him as the most monumental ass that has yet been produced by a painstaking world; personally, I think the picture a trifle harsh. Percy meant well; and it wasn't really his fault that the events I am about to chronicle ended so disastrously. Unfortunately, however, he was unable to get the General to see eye to eye with him in this trifling matter; and so, as I have already said, Percy beat it in about ten seconds.

The whole trouble started over the question of man-traps. "If," remarked a Sapper subaltern one night after the port had been round more than once—"If one could construct a large conical hole like an inverted funnel in the front-line trench, so that the small opening was in the trench itself, and the bottom of the funnel fifteen or twenty feet below in the ground, and if the Huns came over and raided us one night, one might catch one or two." He dreamily emptied and refilled his glass.

"By Jove, dear old boy"—Percy fixed his eyeglass and gazed admiringly at the speaker—"that's a splendid idea! Sort of glorified man-trap—what! —dear old thing."

"That's it, Percy, old lad. Why don't you make one next time you're in the trenches?" The speaker winked at the remainder of the party.

"'Pon my soul, dear old man, I think I will." Percy was clearly struck with the idea. "Cover the hole, don't you know, with trench-boards by day,

and have it open at night. Great idea, old sport, great idea!"

"You could go and fish for them in the morning with a sausage on the end of a string," murmured some one. "Get 'em to sing the 'Hymn of Hate' before they got any breakfast."

"Or even place large spikes at the bottom on which they would fall and become impaled." The first speaker was becoming bloodthirsty.

"Oh, no, dear old chap! I don't think an impaled Hun would look very nice. It would be quite horrible in the morning, when one started to count up the bag, to find them all impaled. Besides, there might be two on one stake." Exactly the objection to the last contingency was not clear; but after dinner attention to such trifles is of secondary importance.

"Percy inaugurates new form of frightfulness," laughed the Major. "May I be there when you catch your first!"

The conversation dropped; other and more intimate topics anent the fair ones at home took its place; but in the mind of Percy FitzPercy the germ of invention was sown. When he went back to his battalion that night, in their so-called rest-billets, he was thinking. Which was always a perilous proceeding for Percy.

Now it so happened that his part of the line at the moment had originally belonged to the Hun. It was a confused bit of trench, in which miners carried on extensively their reprehensible trade. And where there are miners there is also spoil.

Spoil, for the benefit of the uninitiated, is the technical name given to the material they remove from the centre of the earth during the process of driving their galleries. It is brought up to the surface in sandbags, and is then carried away and dumped somewhere out of harm's way. In reality it is generally stacked carefully in the trenches themselves, thereby completely blocking all traffic ; which is by the way.

But after mining has been in progress for some time, and various craters have been blown and sapped out to, and after trench mortars have "strafed" consistently for many months and torn the original surface of the ground to pieces, the actual position of the trenches themselves becomes haphazard. They cease in many cases to bear the slightest likeness to the ordinary trenches of commerce ; they become deep gorges in mountains of sandbags. I have sometimes wished that those officers who apparently write home to devoted bands of female workers asking for more sandbags would get in touch with me instead. I shall be delighted to let them have anything up to five million, all filled, by return ; which is again by the way.

To return to Percy. In his part of the front sandbags grew like pebbles on a shingly beach ; and from time to time fresh cuts off the trenches were opened to allow for further expansion in the sandbag family. The existing front line in one place had started life as a cut off the old trench, and had gradually been taken into use as a permanency, and it was at this point

that he stumbled on the great discovery which was destined to cause all the trouble. How he first stumbled is not recorded; but early one morning Percy FitzPercy could have been seen like a terrier with his nose down a rabbit-hole, lying flat at the bottom of the trench, peering into a noisome and foul-smelling cavity underneath him.

"My dear old boy," he remarked, enthusiastically, to a brother subaltern, who was watching the proceeding coldly, "it's an old German dug-out; I'm *certain* it's an old German dug-out."

"I don't care a damn if it is," answered the other, without enthusiasm. "It stinks like a polecat, and is undoubtedly full of all creeping things. For heaven's sake, let's go and get something to eat."

Slowly and reluctantly Percy allowed himself to be led away, thinking deeply. Only the week before had the Hun attempted a raid and actually entered the trench close to the spot in question, and here was apparently a ready-made man-trap should he do so again. After breakfast he would explore his find; after breakfast he would himself set to work and labour unceasingly. As I have said, Percy FitzPercy meant well.

It is possible that lesser men might have been deterred by the unpromising results of that exploration. Descending gingerly through the hole, which had been widened sufficiently to allow of the passage, Percy switched his torch around the cavity he found himself in. Above his head long rounded timbers, side by side and touching one another, formed the

roof, which was in good condition, save in the centre, where the blue sky shone through the hole he had entered by. In one corner stood a bedstead covered by a moth-eaten blanket, while all over the floor crumbling sandbags and old clothes and equipment gave it the appearance of a rag-and-bone shop. In one place the wall had fallen in, a mound of chalk filled the corner, and from a score of vantage points elderly rodents watched with increasing disfavour this unexpected human invasion.

Up above in the trench the disfavour was repeated in that picturesque phraseology for which Thomas is famous.

"Wot are you a-doing 'ere?" An incensed sergeant rounded a corner, and gazed wrathfully at three privates, each armed with a spade and wearing gas helmets. "Wot 'ave you got them 'elmets on for?" He approached the fatal hole, and recoiled slightly. "Gaw-lumme! Wot's that smell?"

"Percy," answered a sepulchral voice. "Our little Perce."

"Wot yer mean—Percy? Wot's that 'ole?" A cloud of dust at that moment rose through it, and he recoiled still farther. "Oo's down there?"

"Percy," answered the same sepulchral voice. "Percy FitzP. carrying hout a reconaysance in force. 'E's found a 'Un smell factory, and 'e's fair wallowing in it."

At that moment a voice came gently through the opening. "I say, you fellahs, just come down here a moment, and bring your shovels—what?"

A face, covered with a fine coating of blackish-grey dust, popped up out of the bottom of the trench. "We're fairly going to catch the old Hun before we've finished."

With a choking gasp the sergeant lost all self-control and faded rapidly away, while the three privates slowly and reluctantly followed the face through the hole.

It was fortunate—or possibly, in view of future events, unfortunate—that during the next two hours no responsible individual came along that particular piece of front line. Incidentally there was nothing surprising in the fact. In most places, especially during the day, the front line is held but lightly by isolated posts, which are visited from time to time by the company or platoon commander, and more rarely by the Colonel. On this particular occasion the C.O. had already paid his visit to the scene of activity. The company commander was wrestling with returns, and Percy himself led the long-suffering platoon. And so without hindrance from any outsiders the fell business proceeded.

Volumes of evil-smelling dust poured out into the trench, punctuated from time to time with boots, a few rats who had met with an untimely end, some unrecognisable garments, and large numbers of empty bottles. An early investigation had shown the indomitable leader that the old shaft which had led down to the dug-out in the days when it was used was completely blocked up, and so the hole through the roof was the only means of entrance or exit.

Moreover, the hole being in the centre of the roof, and the dug-out being a high one, there was no method of reaching it other than by standing on the bed or the decomposing chair. Once the bird was in there, granted the bed had been removed, there was therefore no way by which he could get out without being helped from above. And so with joy in his heart the indefatigable Percy laboured on, what time three sweating privates consigned him to the uttermost depths of the pit.

Now one may say at once that Percy had all the makings in him of the true artist. Having decided to stage his performance, he had no intention of letting it fail through lack of attention to detail. Life in the front trenches is not at any time an enlivening proceeding; the days drag wearily by, the nights are full of noises and Verey lights—and this particular part of the line was no exception to the general rule. So our hero was not distracted by mundane influences or stress of work from elaborating his scheme. In addition, once the miasma had subsided, and the idea had been explained to them, the three supers became quite keen themselves. It was one of them, in fact, who suggested the first detail.

"'Ow are we to know, sir," he remarked, as they sat resting on an adjacent fire-step after three hours' strenuous exhuming, "that supposing two of the perishers fall through the 'ole they won't escape? Two men could get out of that there place without no bed to 'elp 'em."

"By Jove, yes!" Percy scratched his forehead and left furrows of white in the general darkness. "By Jove, yes; you're quite right—what? Break one's heart to lose the blighters, don't you know. You're a doocid clever fellow to think of that, Jenkins."

"Tomkins, sir," murmured the originator of the brain-wave, slightly abashed by the unexpected praise.

"We might," remarked another of the world's workers, thoughtfully sucking his teeth—"we might 'ave a trap-door, a 'eavy one, to let down over the 'ole once they was in."

"Yus—and 'ow are we to know when they is in?" The third member of the party proceeded to justify his existence. "They won't come over 'ere and fall into the 'ole and then shout to us to let down the trap." He thoughtfully lit a Woodbine. "The 'Un will be strafing if there's a raid on, and there'll be the 'ell of a beano going on, and no one won't never 'ear nothing."

With which sage aphorism he relapsed into silence, and a gloom settled on the meeting.

"By Jove, you fellows, we must think of something! We must pull up our socks and think—what? After we've spent all this time clearing the bally place out we must really think of something—by Jove!" Percy gazed hopefully at his three supers, but it seemed that their contributions to the conversation were at an end, and for a space silence reigned, broken only by the gentle lullaby of the tooth-sucker.

"We might," remarked Tomkins at length, after

a period of profound thought, "'ave a trip-wire, wot would ring a gong."

"That's it—that's it! 'Pon my word, you're a doocid clever fellow, Thomson, doocid clever fellow—what?" Percy became enthusiastic. "Ring the gong where the fellah is who lets down the door. He lets down the door, and we bag the Hun. Dam good idea!"

"I don't believe in no gongs," remarked the musical one scornfully. "No—nor trip-wires neither." He eyed his audience pugnaciously.

"But, my good fellah—er—what do you believe in?" Percy's spirits were sinking.

"Tins, china, cups and saucers, plates, old saucepans—anything and everything wot will make a noise when the 'Un falls on it. That's the ticket, sir," he continued, with gathering emphasis as he noted the impression he was causing. "Lumme—a trip-wire: it might break, or the gong mightn't ring, or the blighter mightn't 'ear it. Wiv china—every step he took 'e'd smash anuvver pot. Drahn a rum jar 'e would. But—a trip-wire!" He spat impartially and resumed his tune.

"By Jove, that's a splendid idea!" The mercurial Percy's face shone again. "Splendid idea! Fill it full of old tins and china—what? And when we hear the second fellah hit the floor and start breakin' up the home we can pull the string and let down the trap-door. Splendid idea! Doocid clever of you, 'pon my soul it is!"

"And where do you think of getting the china

from ?" Tomkins, fearing that his mantle of doocid cleverness was descending upon the tooth-sucker, eyed him unconvinced. "I wasn't aware as 'ow there was a penny bazaar in the neighbourhood, nor yet a William Whiteley's."

"Yes, by Jove," chirped Percy, "where do we get it all from ? We shall want lots of it, too, don't you know—what ?"

"Get it ?" The suggester of the idea looked scornful and addressed himself to Tomkins. "There ain't no bully tins in the perishing trenches, are there ? Ho no ! An' there hain't no china an' bits of glass and old cups and things in that there village about 'alf a mile down the road ? Ho no ! I reckon there's enough to fill twenty 'oles like that there." Once again the oracle resumed his hobby.

"Splendid !" Percy jumped to his feet. "The very thing ! We'll do it this next company relief, by Jove ! Now, boys, two more hours. We just want to get the bedstead out and straighten things up, and we'll be all ready for the dinner-service—what ?"

Now there was another thing in which Percy FitzPercy showed that he had the makings of a true artist. He fully appreciated the value of secrecy in presenting his performances to the public at large. True, all his platoon were bound to find out, and the remainder of the company had a shrewd idea that something was afoot. But one does not walk along trenches—especially in the front line—for pleasure ; and beyond a casual inquiry as to what new form of insanity he was up to now, the company

commander was not interested in Percy's doings. Now that the place had been cleared out, the opening was covered during the day by a trench-board carefully stolen from the nearest R.E. dump; while the members of the platoon assiduously collected old tin and china utensils, both great and small, which were thrown into the cavity and arranged tastefully by the stage-manager.

At night the trench-board was removed, and after careful weighting with two dud shells, a piece of rail, and the stalk of a sixty-pound trench-mortar bomb, it was placed on edge beside the hole. It was so arranged that it leaned slightly inwards, and was only kept from falling by a cord which passed in front of it and which was attached to two screw pickets —one on each side. The hole itself was covered with a sack. So much for the scenery.

The stage directions were equally simple. The curtain rises on a German raid. Noises off, etc.; the flashes of guns, the bursting of rum jars, the dazzling brilliance of flares lighting up the lowering night. On the entrance of the Hun into the trench (if he did), a watch would be kept on the hole (if any one was there to watch). On the sound of the first crash of breaking china, no action. On the sound of the second crash of breaking china, Percy himself (if alive) or a substitute (if not), would dash forward and cut the string. The trap-door would fall; and then, having repelled the Hun, they could return and examine the bag at their leisure. So much for the plot. Now for the action.

It has always been my contention that Brigadier-General Herbert Firebrace rather brought it on himself. here are things which generals may do, and there are things which they may not; or shall we say, lest I be deemed guilty of *lèse majesté*, things it were better they did not? All things to them are lawful, but all things most undoubtedly are not expedient. And no one—not even his most fervent admirer—could say that the General's action was a wise one. Let it be understood that when the more exalted ones of the earth desire to make a tour of trenches, there is a recognised procedure for doing it. First comes the sergeant of the platoon occupying the portion of the line under inspection—experience has shown the wisdom of having the only trustworthy guide in front. Then comes the company commander, followed by the Colonel, the Staff officer and the Great One. Immediately behind, the Adjutant (taking notes), the platoon commander (partially dazed), the machine-gun officer (not essential), and the Sapper (if he's been caught by the human avalanche) advance in echelon. At intervals the procession halts, and the same religious rite takes place.

SERGEANT (*peering round the next traverse, in voice of fury*): "Don't drink tea out of yer tin 'at, yer perisher! 'Ere's the General a-coming."

COLONEL (*prompted by company commander*): "Now from here, sir, we get a most magnificent field of fire behind—ah—those craters there. I thought that—where was it we decided?—oh, yes, by—ah—putting

a Lewis gun here . . . er, well, perhaps you'd like to look yourself, sir."

GREAT ONE: "Yes, very much. Have you got my periscope?" (*Staff officer produces, and Great One peers through it.*) "I quite agree with you." (*After long inspection*) "You might make a note of it."

STAFF OFFICER: "Just make a note of that, will you?"

ADJUTANT (*makes note*): "Make a note of it, Bill, will you?"

PLATOON COMMANDER (*recovering slightly from stupor*): "Make a note of what?"

MACHINE-GUN OFFICER: "All right, old boy. It's my pidgeon." (*Sotto voce to* SAPPER) "I've had a gun there for the last two nights." (*Aloud to* OMNES) "An excellent place, sir. I'll see to it."

SAPPER (*to* M.G.O., *with seeming irrelevance*): "Well, when he got to the house he was told she was having a bath, and——" Procession moves on, while infuriated sentry on sap duty misses the point of the story. And that is the right way of touring the trenches.

Unfortunately General Firebrace was a new broom. It was quite permissible for him to do what he did, but, as I said before, I am doubtful if it was altogether wise. In a moment of rashness he decided to go round the trenches alone. As a matter of fact, at the moment of this resolve the Brigade-Major was out, the evening was fine, and the General was energetic. Perfect peace reigned over that portion

of the battle area which concerned him, and he was anxious to see that the arrangement of sentry groups in the various sap-heads met with his approval. His predecessor, he recalled, had had words with the still greater ones of the earth anent a couple of small, but nevertheless regrettable, incidents when men had been removed somewhat forcibly by the wily Hun from out those same sap-heads. So he settled his steel helmet firmly on his head, and stepped out of his dug-out into the communication trench.

Now in that particular part of the line the communication trenches were long ones, and by the time he reached the front line it was getting dark. A man of small stature, but withal fiery appearance, General Herbert Firebrace strode along through the deepening gloom, humming gently to himself. At first the trenches were fairly populous—he was in a part of the front line between two groups of craters—and he found it necessary to bark "Gangway!" continuously. Then he reached his goal, the saps behind one of the groups—short trenches which stretch out from the fire trench into No Man's Land and finish on the near lips of the craters. He grunted with satisfaction as he found the first of the saps held to his satisfaction. The sentry group were quietly smoking; the sentry up at the head of the sap was watching fixedly through his periscope. The rifles and bayonets of the men rested close at hand, the Mills bombs were conveniently placed on a narrow ledge under cover.

"Ha, good! All quiet here, my lads?"

"All quiet, sir," answered the corporal, scrambling up.

"That's all right. Good night, corporal." And the martial little figure disappeared round the corner.

Now the corporal was new in that bit of the line; to be exact, he had just returned from leave. That was one cause.

"Look out—oil-can!" The sentry gave a hail, and every one ducked. That was the other cause.

For at the precise moment that an oil-can exploded with a thunderous crump twenty yards or so beyond the trench, there was a sudden noise of ripping canvas, an agonised shout, and the heavy crash of a body encountering china. Then—silence. The sap parties heard only the oil-can; Percy FitzPercy for a wonder was not brooding over his invention, and there was no one who knew that close beside them in an odoriferous underground abode the Brigadier-General lay completely stunned, with his head in a metal soup tureen and his rather extensive set of uppers in a disused tin hitherto devoted to that painstaking gentleman, Mr. Maconochie.

Up to this point it will be willingly conceded, I think, by any one acquainted with trench etiquette that the unfortunate predicament of Herbert Firebrace, General and Great One, was only what he deserved. To depart so flagrantly from the spirit of the rules as to wander round front-line trenches alone and in the falling shades of night is asking for trouble; and if the matter had ended there I have

no doubt—knowing the strict sense of justice which is one of the praiseworthy features of the house of Firebrace—I have no doubt that he would have sent for Percy FitzPercy and apologised handsomely for the inconvenience he had so unwittingly caused. But the matter did not end there; it only began. And the finale, reviewed dispassionately, undoubtedly gives one to think—one might even say think furiously.

A quarter of an hour after the regrettable occurrence just described Percy stood chatting lightly and inconsequently with his company commander in the support line. At the moment he was expatiating on the merits of a new pipe of his own invention designed for use in No Man's Land on a dark night. Its exact beauties escape my memory; as far as I can remember one put the bowl in one's mouth and the tobacco in the stem and blew. It was an invention typical of Percy—utterly futile. He had just called the company commander "dear old soul" for the tenth time, and was explaining how no sparks or glowing ash could be seen if you made use of this patent atrocity, when a Lewis gun started rattling away in front. Half a dozen Verey lights shot up, there was a sudden brisk burst of firing, with the explosion of a number of bombs.

"By Jove!" cried Percy, pipe and all else forgotten. "By Jove, dear old man—a raid—what? A Hun raid—now for the man-trap!" He departed at speed up the nearest boyau, leaving a trail of sparks behind him like a catherine-wheel that has been out

in the rain; to be followed by his Captain, who had first taken the precaution of loading his automatic.

The first man Percy met was the tooth-sucker, who was shaking with uncontrollable excitement.

"There's a perisher fell in the 'ole, sir! Three of 'em come in, and we killed two an' the other fell in the 'ole."

I am given to understand that on receipt of the news what little intellect our pipe-inventor ever possessed completely deserted him. Uttering hoarse cries, he dashed down the trench, and, unmindful of his own orders to wait on the chance of catching a second, he feverishly slashed at the string, and with an ominous clang and a squelch of mud the trap-door descended into its appointed position. Certain it is, when the company commander came in sight, he was standing upon it, in an attitude strongly reminiscent of the heavy tragedian—out of a "shop"—holding forth in his favourite Bodega.

"What the blazes are you doing there?" howled his infuriated Captain. "Why aren't you in number eight sap, instead of doing a dumb-crambo show?"

"The raid is over, sir," answered Percy, majestically. "The raider is—ah—below."

"What the——" began the frenzied senior. And then he paused. "Great Scott! What's that infernal shindy?"

From below their feet there rose a perfect orgy of breaking china and rattling tins, with ever and anon a loud musical note as of a bucket being belaboured with a stick. Grunts and guttural

curses, followed by strange hollow noises indicative of pain, for a while drowned all attempts at conversation. Finally there was a grand finale of crashing cups and tinkling tins, the sound of a heavy blow, a grunt of muffled agony and—silence. The lights still hissed up into the night, stray rifles still cracked at intervals, but otherwise—silence.

At last Percy spoke. "Do you know, dear old boy, I believe there are two of them down there; 'pon my soul, I do—what?" He spoke with deliberation, as befits an inventor. "It seemed to me that the one who swore and the one who grunted were different people."

The tooth-sucker opined likewise; also Tomkins, who had arrived on the scene.

"What is this dam foolishness?" said the Captain irritably. "Am I to understand there are two Germans inside there, under the trench?"

"One for certain; two possibly—or even three, dear old boy." At the thought of three, he of the teeth played a tune in his excitement.

"Then for heaven's sake get the top off and let's get them out!"

It was then that the last cruel blow of Fate was dealt to the hapless Herbert. For after a brief period of feverish pulling, during which the company commander broke his nails and Percy fell over backwards, the trap-door remained *in statu quo*.

"What the devil's the matter with the beastly thing?" muttered the Captain, savagely. "It's your fool-trick, FitzPercy! Can't you open it?"

"My dear old boy," remarked the proud inventor vaguely, "it generally opens—'pon my soul, it does." He turned his torch on to the reluctant trench-board and examined it through his eyeglass. "By Jove! that's it, dear old son, there's the trouble. The dud shell has slipped forward and got wedged in the rafters. How doocid funny—what?"

"What is doocid funny, you blithering ass?"

"Why, if we'd gone on, dear old sport, the shell might have gone off. By Jove, that's good, that is!" Percy chuckled immoderately. "If we go on, the shell goes off!"

"You're the type of man who ought to be in a home," remarked his senior officer dispassionately. "Get a saw as soon as you can, and cut through the board. And if the bally shell goes off and kills you, it'll serve you right. You're a disease, FitzPercy, that's what you are. A walking microbe; an example of atavism; a throw-back to the tail period." Still muttering, his company commander passed out of sight, leaving the triumphant Percy completely unabashed and glowing with righteous success.

Now, in the trenches saws do not grow freely. You cannot wander round a corner and pick one up; in fact, a saw that will saw is an exceeding precious thing. Moreover, they are closely guarded by their rightful owners, who show great reluctance in parting with them. It therefore was not surprising that over an hour elapsed before a perspiring messenger returned with one and operations commenced. And during that hour Percy lived.

It is given to few to see their hopes and aspirations realised so beautifully and quickly; as in a dream he listened to the hideous cachinnations that floated up through the slabs of the trench-board. A continuous booming noise as of a bittern calling to its young was varied with heavy grunts and occasional blows of a heavy bludgeon on metal. And throughout it all there ran a delicate *motif* of crashing cups and tinkling tins.

"We have them, dear old soul," murmured Percy ecstatically to himself; "we have them simply wallowing in the mulligatawny!"

But there is an end of everything—even of getting a saw out of an R.E. store. A glorious full moon shone down upon the scene as, an hour afterwards, the trench-board was removed and the entrance opened. An "up-and-over"—or trench-ladder—was lowered into the dug-out, and the excited onlookers waited to vet the catch. At last the ladder shook, as the first of the prisoners prepared to ascend.

"Entrance, dear old man," cried the stage-manager, majestically, "of what we have hitherto described as 'male voices off.'"

"Get up, you swine, and get a move on!" rasped a voice in perfect English from the depths of the hole; while a palsied silence settled on the audience.

The ladder shook again, and at last there emerged from the bottom of the trench a large round tin which completely encased the head of its wearer, who slowly followed, maintaining a continuous booming roar. Immediately behind him came the owner

of the voice, severely chipped about the face, but with the light of battle in his eyes.

"Now, you——" The words died away in his mouth. "Great heavens! The General!" And as the frozen eye of the speaker, who had been the other occupant of the hole, wandered round the stricken onlookers, even Percy's nerve broke. It was the Colonel

I will draw the veil of reticence over the remainder of this harrowing narrative. The procession back to Brigade Head-quarters has become historic. The attempt to remove the soup tureen on the spot caused its unhappy possessor such agony, and gave rise to so much unseemly and ill-repressed mirth on the part of the audience, that it was hastily abandoned, and the wretched man was led gently back to his dug-out.

The Brigade-Major, who had been notified over the telephone, met him at the entrance with a handkerchief suspiciously near his mouth.

"How dreadful, sir!" he murmured, in a voice that shook a little. "I have—er—sent for a tin-opener."

The General was led to a chair, into which he sank wearily, while in hushed tones the Colonel explained what had happened to the shaking Staff.

"I was told that the General had been seen going down to the front line alone," he remarked in a low tone, "and so I at once followed him. Just as I got to the craters there was a small Hun raid. I let drive at one of them with my revolver, and the next

instant I fell through a hole, full on top of some one's back. He let out a roar of pain and scrambled up. Of course I thought it was a Hun, and proceeded to beat him over the head with my stick. Great Scott, what a show!"

The Colonel mopped his brow, and the Staff shook still more.

"I'd dropped my revolver, or I'd probably have shot him. Then suddenly there was a clang, and the hole was closed up, while at the same moment something charged past me, head down, and hit the wall. There was a roar of pain, and the tin became a fixture. The poor old boy had rammed the wall with the soup tureen."

A gurgling noise from the chair interrupted him.

"What is it, sir?" cried the Staff Captain, solicitously.

The General hooted mournfully.

"Yes, sir. He'll be here very soon, sir. Not much longer now. We've sent for a tinsmith from one of the Engineer companies."

But the booming cantata continued.

"What does he want?" whispered the Staff Captain. "A drink?"

The Brigade-Major looked hopeful.

"Yes; get a whisky and soda and a straw, if there's one left."

The booming died away.

A few minutes later the Staff, ably assisted by the General's batman, got one end of the straw into the worthy Brigadier's mouth. The Colonel closed those

holes he could see with his fingers, and the signalling officer held the drink.

"Now, are we ready?" cried the Brigade-Major anxiously. "All right, sir—suck."

The experiment was not a success. Jets of liquid spurted in all directions, an explosion like a geyser shook the tin, and the Staff recoiled a pace. In fact, I am given to understand that the chief clerk, an intensely interested spectator, so far forgot himself as to counsel the Staff Captain to "sit on 'is 'ead."

"Do you think we could do anything with one of those instruments for opening tongues?" hazarded the Staff Captain, when the silence had become oppressive and the outbursts of fire extinguished.

"We might try." The signalling officer was doubtful, but sallied forth, and after some delay returned with one. "Where shall we start?"

"Any old place." The Staff Captain gripped the implement and stepped manfully forward "We're going to try something else, sir—a tongue-opener."

The General hooted apathetically; the onlookers looked anxious, and the Staff Captain got his first grip on the tin.

"Hold the General's head, Bill," he cried to the Brigade-Major, "so that I can get a purchase. Now, then—one—two——"

A howl of agony rent the air, and even the chief clerk looked pensive.

"It's his ear, you fool!" The Colonel dodged rapidly out of the door to evade the human tornado within, and the situation became crucial. Even the

tinsmith, who arrived at that moment, a man of phlegmatic disposition, was moved out of his habitual calm and applauded loudly.

"Thank heavens you've come!" gasped the Brigade-Major, keeping a wary eye fixed on his frenzied senior, who, surrounded with *débris* and red ink, was now endeavouring to pull the tin off with his hands. "The General has had a slight mishap. Can you remove that tin from his head?"

The expert contemplated his victim in silence for a few moments.

"Yus," he remarked at length, "I can, sir, if 'e keeps quite still. But I won't be answerable for the consequences if 'e don't."

"No more will I." The Brigade-Major mopped his brow. "For heaven's sake get on with it."

Thus ended the episode of Percy FitzPercy—his man-trap.

It might have happened to any one, but only FitzPercy would have searched carefully amongst the crockery, and having found what he was looking for made a point of bringing it to head-quarters just as the tin was finally removed.

To emerge into the light of two candles and an electric torch with a bit of one ear and half a face deficient, and realise that the man responsible for it is offering you your uppers in three parts and some fragments, is a situation too dreadful to contemplate.

As I said before, Percy gave up trying after about ten seconds.

IV

A POINT OF DETAIL

"HIST!" The officer gripped the sergeant's arm just above the elbow, bringing his mouth close up to his ear. "Don't move." The words were hardly breathed, so low was the tense, sudden whisper, and the two men crouched motionless, peering into the darkness which enveloped them.

"Where, sir?" The sergeant slowly twisted his head till it was almost touching that of the man beside him; and he too, whose normal voice resembled a human fog horn, scarcely did more than frame the words with his lips.

"Behind that mound of chalk. Several of them." The sergeant's eyes followed the line of the outstretched hand until they picked up the dark menacing lump in the ground twenty feet away. Sombre, grim, apparently lifeless, outlined against the night sky—it appeared almost monstrous in size to the men who lay on the edge of a shell hole, with every nerve alert. A bullet spat over them viciously, but they did not alter their position—they knew they were not the target; and from their own lines came

the sudden clang of a shovel. All around them the night was full of vague, indefinable noises; instinctively a man, brought suddenly into such a place and ignorant of his whereabouts, would have known that there were men all around him: men whom he could not see, men who flitted through the shadows bent on mysterious tasks, men who moved silently, with eyes strained to pierce the darkness. Behind the German lines a trench tramway was in use; the metallic rumble of the trolleys on the iron rails came continuously from the distance. And suddenly from close at hand a man laughed. . . .

"Do you see them?" Once again the officer was whispering, while he still grasped, almost unconsciously, the sergeant's arm. "There—there! Look!"

Two or three shadowy blobs seemed to move uncertainly above the edge of the chalk mound and then disappear again; and a moment afterwards, from almost on top of them, came a hoarse guttural whisper. The officer's grip tightened convulsively; the night of a sudden seemed alive with men close to them—pressing around them. Almost involuntarily he got up and moved back a few steps, still peering, straining to see in the inky blackness. Something loomed up and bumped into him, only to recoil with a muttered oath; and even as he realised it was a German he heard his sergeant's low voice from a few feet away. "Where are you, sir? Where are you?" The next moment he was back at his side.

"Get back your own way," he whispered; "we've

bumped a big patrol. Don't fire." And as he spoke, with a slight hiss a flare shot up into the night.

Now had it not been for that one untimely flare this story would never have been written. Indecent curiosity in other wanderers' doings in No Man's Land is an unprofitable amusement; while the sound of strafing, to say nothing of revolver shots, is calculated to produce a tornado of fire from all directions, administered impartially by friend and foe alike. Wherefore it is more than likely that but for the sudden ghostly light both the Englishmen would have got away. As it was, John Brinton, M.C., Lieutenant in His Majesty's Regiment of the Royal Loamshires, found himself crouching in a slight dip in the ground and contemplating from a range of four feet no less than six Huns similarly engaged. There was the sharp crack of a revolver, a struggle, a muffled cry; then silence. Half a dozen more flares went up from each line; everywhere sentries peered earnestly towards the sound of the shot; a few desultory rifles cracked, and then the night resumed its whispering mystery. But at the bottom of the dip five Huns lay on the top of a stunned English officer; while the sixth lay still and twisted, with a revolver bullet in his brain.

Twenty minutes afterwards the sergeant, crawling warily on his belly, approached a saphead and after a brief word or two dropped in.

"'Ave you seen Mr. Brinton, sir," he asked anxiously of an officer whom he found in the sap,

pessimistically smoking a cigarette—saps are pessimistic places.

"No." The officer looked up quickly. "He was out with you, wasn't he, Sergeant Dawson?"

"Yes, sir—on patrol. We'd just a-got to that there chalk 'ummock, when we ran into some of 'em. 'E said to me—'Get back,' 'e said, 'your own way,' and then they put up a flare. I couldn't see 'im as I was lying doggo in a 'ole, but I 'eard a revolver shot about ten yards away. I looked round when the flare was out, but couldn't see him, nor 'ear him. So I thought 'e might 'ave got back."

"Pass the word along for Mr. Brinton." The officer went out of the sap into the fire trench. "And get a move on with it." He stood for a few moments, looking thoughtful. "I hope," he muttered to himself, "I hope the old boy hasn't been scuppered."

But—the old boy *had* been scuppered. A runner failed to discover him in the trench; two strong patrols scoured the ground around the chalk 'ummock and drew blank. And so, in the fullness of time there appeared in the Roll of Honour the name of Lieut. John Brinton, of the Royal Loamshires, under the laconic heading of Missing, believed Prisoner of War, which is the prologue of this tale of the coalfields of France.

The part of the line in which the Royal Loamshires found themselves at the time of the unfortunate matter of John Brinton, M.C., was somewhere south of La Bassée and somewhere north of Loos—closer

identification is undesirable. It is not a pleasant part of the line, though there are many worse. The principal bugbears of one's existence are the tunnelling companies, who without cessation practise their nefarious trade, thereby causing alarm and despondency to all concerned. Doubtless they mean well, but their habit of exploding large quantities of ammonal at uncertain hours and places does not endear them to the frenzied onlookers, who spend the next hour plucking boulders from their eyes. In addition, there is the matter of sandbags. The proximity of a mine shaft is invariably indicated by a young mountain of these useful and hygienic articles, which tower and spread and expand in every direction where they are most inconvenient. I admit that, having placed half the interior of France in bags, the disposal of the same on arriving in the light of day presents difficulties. I admit that the fault lies entirely with the harassed and long-suffering gentleman who boasts the proud title of "spoil's officer." I admit—— But I grow warm, in addition to digressing unpardonably. The trouble is that I always do grow warm, and digress at the mention of sandbags.

In part of the Loamshires' front line, mining activity was great. A continuous group of craters stretched along No Man's Land, separating them from the wily Hun, for half the battalion front—a group which we will call Outpost. The name is wrong, but it will serve. To the near lips of each crater a sap ran out from the front line, so that merely the great

yawning hole lay between the saphead and the corresponding abode of the Germans on the other lip. Each night these sapheads were held by a small group of men armed with Verey lights, bombs, bowie-knives, and other impedimenta of destruction ; while between the saps the trench was held but lightly—in some cases, not at all. The idea of concentrating men in the front line has long been given up by both sides.

If therefore one strolls along the firing line—a tedious amusement at all times—it is more than likely that one will find long stretches completely deserted. The scene is desolate ; the walk is strangely eerie. Walls of sandbags tower on each side, in some cases two or three feet above one's head ; the clouds go scudding by, while the shadows of a traverse dance fantastically as a flare comes hissing down. The Hun is thirty yards away ; the silence is absolute ; the place is ghostly with the phantoms of forgotten men. And sometimes, as one walks, strange fancies creep into one's brain. Relics of childish fears, memories of the bogey man who waited round the end of the dark passage at home, come faintly from the past. And foolish though it be, one wonders sometimes with a sharp, clutching pang of nervous fear—What is round the next corner ?

Nothing—of course not. What should there be ? The night is quiet ; the trench is English. The next party is forty yards farther on ; the voices of the last still come softly through the air. And yet—and yet——! But I digress again.

Now not one of the least of all the crimes of those responsible for the disposal of the underworld of France, when it comes to the surface in sandbags, is the following. (Lest any one may think that I am writing a text-book, I would crave patience.) Be it known, then, that to keep out a bullet some four feet of earth are necessary. Less than that and the bullet will come through and impinge with great violence on the warrior behind. This fact is well known to all whose path in life leads them to the trenches; but for all that Tommy is a feckless lad. In some ways he bears a marked resemblance to that sagacious bird, the ostrich; and because of that resemblance, I have remarked on this question of disposing sandbags in terms of pain and grief. The easiest thing to do with a sandbag in a trench, if you don't want it, is to chuck it out. Human nature being what it is, the distance chucked is reduced to a minimum—in other words, it is placed on the edge of the parapet. More follow—and they are placed beside it on the edge of the parapet; which causes the inside edge of the parapet to increase in height, but *not* in thickness. In other words, after a while the top two or three layers of bags, though looking perfectly safe from the inside, are not bullet proof. Which Tommy knows—but . . . well, I have mentioned the ostrich.

Now this state of affairs existed in one or two places behind Outpost craters. There were spots where the top of the parapet was not of sufficient thickness to keep out a rifle bullet. And it was just by one of these spots that the Company Commander, going

round one night, suddenly stumbled on something that lay sprawling at the bottom of the trench—an unmistakable something. It lay half on the fire step and half off, midway between two saps, and the head sagged back helplessly. He switched on his torch, and having looked at the huddled form, cursed softly under his breath. For it was his senior subaltern, and a bullet had entered his head from behind just above the neck. It had come out at his forehead, and we will not specify further.

"Stretcher bearers at once." He went back to the group he had just left. "Mr. Dixon has been shot through the parapet, farther up."

"Killed, sir?" The N.C.O. in charge was in Dixon's platoon.

"Yes." The Company Officer was laconic. "Brains blown out. It's that damned parapet—one sandbag thick. What the hell's the use of my speaking?"

He had had a trying day, and his tone may be excused. "You sit here and you do nothing. The whole company are a set of cursed lazy loafers."

Seeing that the men were getting an average of six hours' sleep the remark was hardly fair, but, as I said, the day had been a trying one and this had been the last straw. He strode back again to the dead subaltern, muttering angrily.

"Poor old man," he whispered gently, lifting the legs on to the fire step and bending over the still form. "Poor old man; you've solved the Big Mystery by now, anyway." The light of his torch fell on the

dead man's face, and he shuddered slightly: a bullet can do a lot of damage. Then he climbed on the fire step and looked over the parapet. It was a place where the spoils party had been particularly busy; and though the Company Officer was full six foot, he could only just see over the top; as a fire step it was useless to any one but a giant from a freak show.

"Hullo! what's happened?" A voice behind him made him turn round.

"That you, Dick? Poor little Jerry Dixon been shot through the parapet—that's what's happened." He got down and stood at the bottom of the trench beside the second-in-command. "The three top layers there are only one bag thick." Once again his language became heated.

"Steady, old man," Dick Staunton puffed steadily at his pipe, and looked at the body lying beside them. "Were you with him when he was hit?"

"No. Came round visiting the sentries and found him lying there dead."

"Oh!" He switched on his torch and continued smoking in silence. Suddenly he bent forward and peered closely at the shattered head. "Give me a hand for a minute. I want to turn the boy over."

Faintly surprised, he did as he was bid.

In silence they turned the body over, and again there was silence while Staunton carefully examined the spot where the bullet had entered.

"Strange," he muttered to himself after a few

moments, " very strange. Tell me, Joe "—his voice was normal again—" exactly how did you find him ? What position was he in ? "

" He was half sitting on the fire step, with his head in the corner and his legs sprawling in the bottom of the trench."

" Sitting ? Then his face was towards you."

" Why, yes. Is there anything peculiar in the fact ? He'd probably just been having a look over the top, and as he turned away to get down he was hit through the sandbags in the back of the neck. His head was a bit forward as he was getting down, so the bullet passed through his head and out of his forehead."

In silence they turned the boy over again and covered his face with a pocket-handkerchief.

" You're too much of a blooming detective, you know, old man. Much police work has made thee mad," laughed the Company Commander. " What else can have happened ? "

" I'm no detective, Joe." The other man smiled slightly. " But there are one or two small points of detail which strike me, though I can make nothing out of them, I admit. First—his height. He's six inches shorter than you, and yet you could barely see over the top. Therefore, what was he doing trying to look over the parapet here of all places ? Secondly, the way he fell. A man killed instantaneously, and shot through the back of his head, would in all probability pitch forward on his face. You say his face was towards you, and that he was sitting in

the corner of the traverse." He paused to fill his pipe.

"Go on," said the Company Commander curiously. "You interest me."

"The third point is one on which I admit that I am doubtful. The bullet wound is clean. Now I am inclined to think—though I don't know—that a bullet passing through a chalk bag would become jagged, and would not be travelling straight when it continued its flight. However, I don't attach much importance to that. And the fourth and last point is almost too trifling to mention. Do you notice anything peculiar about his uniform?"

The listener flashed his torch over the dead officer. "No," he said at length. "I can't say that I do. Except that one of his regimental badges is missing. I suppose you don't mean that, do you?" The Company Officer laughed irritably.

"I do," returned the other quietly. "It's a point of detail, even if a little one." He looked thoughtfully at the man in front of him. "Do I strike you as a callous sort of devil, old man?"

"You seem to be treating the boy rather on the line of a specimen for improving your deductive powers."

"Perhaps you're right." Staunton turned away. "But I didn't mean it that way—quite. Sorry, Joe; the boy was a pal of yours?"

"He was."

"God rest his soul!" The second-in-command spoke low. Then, with a final salute to the youngster

whose soul had gone to the haven of fighting men, he turned away and vanished into the night.

. . . . .

The next day the Company Commander came round to Battalion Head-quarters.

"My two best subalterns," grunted the Colonel in disgust, "within two days. Very annoying. Good boys—toppers both of them. You'd go quite a way, Dick, before you bettered Brinton and Dixon."

"You would," affirmed the second-in-command. "Quite a way."

"And with all your theorising last night, old man," remarked the Captain slyly, "we both forgot the obvious solution. He got on the fire step, found he couldn't see over—so he clambered up on top. Then, when he was getting down, he was hit, and slithered into the position I found him in."

Staunton regarded the speaker through a haze of tobacco smoke. "I wonder," he murmured at length. "I wonder."

He did not state that during the morning he had made a point of interrogating Jerry Dixon's servant. And that worthy—an old and trusted soldier—had very positively denied that either of the Pelicans Rampant, which formed the regimental badge, had been missing from his master's coat the previous evening.

"Now Mr. Brinton's coat, sir," he remarked thoughtfully, "that did 'ave a badge off, that did. But 'is servant!" He snorted, and dismissed the subject scornfully.

As I say, the Major did not mention this fact. After all, it was such a very small point of detail.

To the frivolous-minded, Dick Staunton was at times the cause of a certain amount of amusement. Originally in the Army, he had left it when a junior captain, and had settled down to the normal life of a country gentleman. By nature of a silent disposition, he abominated social functions of all sorts. He hunted, he fished, and he shot, and spent the rest of his time studying the habits of the wild. And as always happens to a man who lives much with nature, his mind gradually got skilled in the noticing of little things. Small signs, invisible to the casual observer, he noticed automatically; and without being in any sense a Sherlock Holmes, he had acquired the habit of putting two and two together in a manner that was, at times, disconcertingly correct.

"Points of detail," he remarked one evening in the dug-out after dinner, "are very easy to see if you have eyes to see them with. One is nothing; two are a coincidence; three are a moral certainty. A really trained man can see a molehill; I can see a mountain; most of you fellows couldn't see the Himalayas." With which sage remark he thoughtfully lit his pipe and relapsed into silence. And silence being his usual characteristic he came into the Battalion Head-quarters dug-out one evening and dropped quietly into a seat, almost unnoticed by the somewhat noisy group around the table.

"Afternoon, Dickie." The Sapper officer looked

up and saw him. "D'you hear we're pinching your last recruit? Jesson—this is Major Staunton." He turned to a second lieutenant in the Royal Loamshires beside him as he made the introduction.

"How d'you do, sir." Jesson got up and saluted. "I've only just got over from England; and now apparently they're attaching me to the R.E., as I'm a miner."

He sat down again, and once more turned his attention to that excellent French illustrated weekly without which no officers' mess in France is complete. Lest I be run in for libel, I will refrain from further information as to its title and general effect on officers concerned.

For a few moments Staunton sat watching the group and listening with some amusement to the criticisms on those lovely members of the fair sex so ably portrayed in its pages, and then his attention centred on the revolver he was cleaning. Jesson, a good-looking, clean-cut man of about twenty-nine or thirty was holding forth on an experience he had had in Alaska, which concerned a woman, a team of dogs, and a gentleman known as One-eyed Pete, and as he spoke Staunton watched him idly. It struck him that he seemed a promising type, and that it was a pity the Tunnellers were getting him.

"Haven't you got enough disturbers of the peace already," he remarked to the Tunnelling officer, "without snatching our ewe lamb?"

"We are at full strength as a matter of fact, Major," answered an officer covered with chalk;

" but they do some funny things in the palaces of the great. We often get odd birds blowing in. I've been initiating him all this morning into the joys of Outpost."

" And how is jolly old Blighty ? " remarked the Adjutant. " Thank Heaven ! leave approaches."

" About the same." Jesson helped himself to a whisky-and-soda. " Darker than ever, and taxis an impossibility. Still I dare say I shall be glad enough to go back when my first leave comes due," he added with a laugh.

" Is this your first time out ? " asked Staunton.

" Yes." Jesson unbuttoned his burberry and took out his cigarette case. Outside the dusk was falling, and he bent forward to get a light from the candle flickering on the table in front of him. " The very first time. I've been on Government work up to now."

It was at that moment that a very close observer might have noticed that Dick Staunton's pipe ceased to draw with monotonous regularity : he might even have heard a quick intake of breath. But he would have had to be a very close one—very close indeed ; for the next instant he was again speaking and his voice was normal.

" I suppose you've been at the depot," he hazarded. " Who are there now ? "

" Oh, the usual old crowd," answered Jesson " I don't expect you know many of them though, do you, Major ? Ginger Stretton in the 14th Battalion—do you know him by any chance ? "

"No, I don't think I do." His face was in the shadow, but had it been visible a slightly puzzled frown might have been seen on his forehead. "I suppose they still make all you fellows on joining go to the regimental tailor, don't they?"

Jesson looked a trifle surprised at the question. "I don't think they are as particular as they were," he returned after a moment. "Personally I went to Jones & Jones." He casually buttoned up his mackintosh and turned to the Tunneller. "If you're ready I think we might be going. I want to see about my kit." He got up as he spoke and turned towards the entrance, while at the same moment the Sapper rose too. "I'd like to drop in again, sir, sometimes if I may." He spoke to the shadow where Staunton had been sitting.

"Do." Jesson gave a violent start, for the voice came from just behind his shoulder. Like the hunter he was, Dick Staunton had moved without a sound, and now stood directly between Jesson and the door. "But don't go yet. I want to tell you a story that may amuse you. Have some tea."

"Er—won't it keep till some other time, Major? I'm rather anxious to see about my kit."

"Let the kit keep. Sit down and have some tea."

"What the devil has come over you, Dickie?" The Adjutant was looking frankly amazed. "You aren't generally so loquacious."

"That's why to-night my little whim must be humoured," answered Staunton with a slight smile.

"Sit down, please, Jesson. It's quite an amusing little yarn, and I would like your opinion on it."

"No hope for you, old boy. Dickie has turned into a social success." The Adjutant laughed and lit a cigarette, and once again became immersed in his paper.

To the casual observer the scene was a very normal one. Four men in a dug-out, yarning and reading; while outside the occasional whine of a shell, the dirty deeds of a Stokes gun, the noises of the trenches filled the air. Nothing unusual, nothing out of the way except—something, an indefinable something. As the Sapper said afterwards there must have been something tangible in the atmosphere—else why did his pulses quicken. He glanced at the Adjutant sitting opposite him engrossed in his book; he looked at Staunton across the table—Staunton, with a slight smile on his lips—and his eyes fixed on Jesson. He looked at Jesson beside him—Jesson, whom he had met that morning for the first time. And all he noticed about Jesson was that his left knee twitched ceaselessly. . . .

He ran over in his mind the day's work. He had met him at about eleven that morning, wandering along the support line with an officer in the Loamshires whom he knew well, who had hailed him and introduced Jesson.

"A recruit—a new recruit," he had said, "for your atrocious trade. He's just left old pimple-faced Charlie, who was writing returns in triplicate as usual."

Now pimple-faced Charlie was his own Major, who habitually did write returns in triplicate; wherefore, after a few remarks of a casual nature in which he elicited the fact that Jesson was a mining engineer and had suddenly been ordered while waiting at the base to join the 940th Tunnelling Company, he took him in tow and showed him round the mine galleries.

Mining work was very active in the sector. Four or five small mines and one big one were going up in the near future, so the tour of inspection had been a long one. That his companion was not new to the game was obvious from the outset; and his pertinent inquiries anent cross-cuts, listening galleries, and the whole of the work in hand had shown that he was keen as well. Altogether a promising recruit, he had mused: quite a find—keen and able, two qualities which unfortunately do not go hand in hand quite as often as one would like. And now Staunton and this find of his were facing one another in silence across the plank table of the dug-out; Jesson, with an expression of polite indifference as befitted a subaltern compelled to listen to a senior officer's story which he didn't want to hear; Staunton, with an enigmatic smile. Then of a sudden Staunton spoke.

"Have you ever studied the question of the importance of matters of detail, Jesson?" he remarked quietly to the impassive figure facing him across the table.

"I can't say that I have, sir," answered the other, politely stifling a yawn.

"You should. A most interesting study. My story concerns points of detail. The imperative thing is to be able to sort out the vital points from all the others; then piece them together, and arrive at the right answer."

"It must be very easy to be led astray, I should imagine; and arrive at the—er—wrong one." Jesson concealed a smile, and waited for the Major to continue.

"Yes and no. It's all a matter of practice." Staunton's imperturbable voice was as quiet as ever. "And anyway, it's only in peace time that it matters very much whether one is right or wrong. Nowadays! Well—*à la guerre comme à la guerre.*" He smiled gently. "But my story. I want you, as an impartial observer, just arrived, with an unbiassed mind, to tell me if you think my joining up of two or three points of detail is a sound one. Both these officers know the points of detail, so your opinion will be more valuable than theirs.

"A few nights ago our battalion had one of those unfortunate little contretemps that so often happen in war. A subaltern of ours, John Brinton by name, went out on patrol, and never returned. An exhaustive search in No Man's Land failed to discover his body; so we were reluctantly compelled to conclude that he was in German hands; whether alive or dead we don't know. There we have the first fact in my case. Now for the second.

"Two nights after that another of our subalterns was killed in a way which struck me as peculiar.

I will not weary you with all the various little points that led me to believe that the bullet which killed him did not come from the trenches opposite ; I will merely say that his position, his height, and the depth of the trench were the most obvious. And granted that my conclusions were correct, strange as it might appear at first sight, his death must have been caused at close quarters, possibly in the trench itself."

"Good Lord!" muttered the Adjutant, who was now listening with interest. "What do you mean?"

"Two facts, you see," went on Staunton quietly. "And they would have remained unconnected in my mind—Brinton's capture and Dixon's death—but for a small point of detail. Dixon's jacket was without the left regimental badge when his body was found. His servant knows he had them both earlier in the day. On the contrary, Brinton had lost his left regimental badge for some time. Am I interesting you?"

"Profoundly, thank you, sir." The man opposite smiled amiably.

"I'm glad of that; it's an interesting problem. You see the significance of that small point about the badge, the way in which it connects very intimately Brinton's capture and Dixon's death. So intimately, in fact, does it connect them, that one is almost tempted to assume that the man who killed Dixon was the man in possession of Brinton's uniform. Are you with me so far?"

"The evidence seems a trifle slight," remarked Jesson.

"Quite true; the evidence is very slight. But then, it often is. Everything up to date turns on the question of the badge. Let me reconstruct a possible—only possible, mark you—story, based on the supposition that my badge theory is correct. A German who speaks English perfectly is given a nice warm uniform taken from a captured British officer. Then he is told to go over to the British lines and see what he can find out. He comes one night; perfectly easy; no trouble; until walking along the front line he meets another officer—alone: an officer of the same regiment as that whose uniform he is wearing. Unavoidable; in fact, less likely to raise suspicion with the frequent changes that occur if he goes to the same regiment than if he went to another. But something happens: either the other officer's suspicions are aroused, or the German does not wish to be recognised again by him. The trench is quiet; an occasional rifle is going off, so he does the bold thing. He shoots him from point-blank range—probably with a Colt. As he stands there with the dead officer in front of him, waiting, listening hard, wondering if he has been heard, he sees the two badges on the officer's coat. So, being a cool hand, he takes off the left one, puts it on his own coat, and disappears for a time. Quite easy; especially when the trenches are old German ones."

"Really, Major, you seem to have made a speciality of detective fiction. As you said, I suppose your theory is possible."

Jesson spoke casually, but his eyes for the first time

left the face of the man opposite him and roved towards the door. For the first time a sudden ghastly suspicion of the truth entered the Sapper's brain; and even as it did so he noticed that Staunton's revolver—the cleansing finished—pointed steadily at Jesson's chest.

"I am glad you think it possible. To render it probable we must go a bit farther. The essence of all detective stories is the final clue that catches the criminal, isn't it?" The revolver moved an inch or two farther into prominence.

"Good Lord, Dickie! Is that gun of yours loaded?" cried the Adjutant in alarm. For the first time he also seemed to become aware that something unusual was happening, and he suddenly stood up. "What the devil is it, Major? What have you got that gun on him for?"

"For fun, dear boy, for fun. It's part of the atmosphere. We've got to the point haven't we, where—in my story, of course—the German dressed in Brinton's uniform comes into the English lines. Now what sort of a man would they send in this part of the line, where mining activity is great? I continue the theory, you see; that's all."

He looked at Jesson, who made no reply; though without cessation he moistened his lips with his tongue.

"A miner." The Adjutant's voice cut in. "Go on, for God's sake."

"Precisely—a miner. The second point of detail; and two points of detail are a strange coincidence—nothing more. Only—there is a third."

"And three are a moral certainty, as you've often said." The Adjutant once again bent across the table and spoke softly. "Are you fooling, Dickie—are you fooling? If so, the joke has gone far enough."

But the Sapper's eyes were fixed on a leg that twitched, and they wandered now and then to a neck where—even in the dim light of a candle—he could see a pulse throbbing—throbbing.

"It's not a joke," he said, and his mouth was dry. "What is the third point of detail, Dickie?"

"Yes, what is the third point of detail, sir?" Jesson's voice was steady as a rock. "I am very interested in your problem." He raised his hands from the table and stretched them in front of him. Not a finger quivered, and with a sublime insolence he examined his nails.

To the Sapper there occurred suddenly those lines of Kipling,

> "For there is neither East nor West, border nor breed nor birth,
> When two strong men come face to face though they come from the ends of the earth."

He *knew* now; he realised the man beside him was a German; he knew that the sentence of death was very near. What the clue was that had given the man away he hardly thought about—in fact, he hardly cared. All he knew was that death was waiting for the man beside him, and that his hands were steady as a rock.

Quietly Staunton leant forward and undid Jesson's

mackintosh. Then he sat back and with his finger he pointed at a spot above his left breast-pocket. "You have never been out to the front, you say; your coat is a new one by Jones & Jones; and yet —until recently—you have been wearing the ribbon of a medal. What medal, Jesson, what medal? It shows up, that clean patch in the light. John Brinton went to Jones & Jones; and John Brinton had a Military Cross."

For a full minute the two men looked into one another's eyes—deep down, and read the things that are written underneath, be a man English or German. Then suddenly Jesson smiled slightly and spoke.

"You are a clever man, Major Staunton. When will the rifle practice take place?"

. . . . .

Thus it ended, the play of which John Brinton's disappearance formed the prologue. But before the curtain rang down on the epilogue the German told them one or two little things: that John Brinton was alive and well; that the existence of Ginger Stretton, to whom he had alluded so glibly, had only become known to him from a letter in Brinton's coat; that the peculiarities of pimple-faced Charlie had been forced on him by his guide before they met the Sapper.

"In fact," as the Adjutant remarked, "the fellow was almost too good a sportsman to——" But that's the epilogue.

A file of men; a watery sun just starting its day's

work; a raw, chilly morning. In front—a man: a man with a white disc of paper pinned over the heart.

A word of command; a pushing forward of safety catches; a volley; a finish.

V

MY LADY OF THE JASMINE

The Kid staggered wearily along the road through the blinding rain. Dodging between the endless streams of traffic, which moved slowly in both directions, now stopping for ten minutes, now jolting forward again for a couple of hundred yards, he walked on towards where he thought his battalion was. The last Staff officer he had seen had told him that, as far as he knew, they had pulled out to rest in some dug-outs about four miles farther on—dug-outs which had only recently been taken from the Germans. To start with he had got on to a lorry, but when darkness fell, and the total progression had been one mile, he decided to walk and save time. Occasionally the lights of a car shone in his face, as its infuriated occupant broke every rule of the Somme roads by double banking; that is, trying to pass the vehicles in front. But at last the traffic wore thinner as the road approached the front line, and an hour and a half after he had left the lorry, it stopped altogether, save for pack-mules and squelching men. The rain still sogged down, and—ye gods! the Kid was tired. Away into the night there stretched a path of slippery duck-boards, threading

its way between shell holes half filled with water. Men loomed up out of the darkness and went past him, slipping and sliding, cursing below their breath. A shower of sparks shot up into the air from a dug-out on his right, and a great lobbing flare away in the distance lit up the scene for a second or two with a ghostly radiance. It showed the Kid the only other near occupant of the reclaimed territory at the moment: a mule, whose four hoofs stuck stiffly out of a shell hole—pointing at him, motionless. With a shudder he moved on along the duck-walk. After all he was but a kid, and he was almighty tired.

For three days he seemed to have been on the run without closing his eyes. First the battalion had gone over the top; then they had worked like slaves consolidating what they'd won; afterwards he had been sent for because of his knowledge of French and German to go back to Divisional Head-quarters; and then he had come back to find the battalion had moved. And any who may have tried walking five or six miles by night in heavy rain to an unknown destination along some of the roads east of Albert, will bear out that it is a wearisome performance. When to these facts is added the further information that the age of the boy was only eighteen, it will be conceded that the breaking-point was not far off.

Now I have emphasised the physical condition of the Kid, as he was known to all and sundry, because I think it may have a bearing on the story I am going to relate. I am no expert in "ologies" and

other things dealing with so-called spiritualistic revelations. I might even say, in fact, that I am profoundly sceptical of them all, though to say so may reveal my abysmal ignorance. So be it; my thumbs are crossed. This is not a controversial treatise on spiritualism, and all that appertains thereto. One thing, however, I will say—in my ignorance, of course. Until some of the great thinkers of the world have beaten down the jungle of facts beyond our ken, and made a track—be it never so narrow—free from knaves and charlatans, it is ill-advised for Mrs. Smith or Lady de Smythe to believe that Signor Macaroni—*né* Jones—will reveal to them the secrets of the infinite for two pounds. He may; on the other hand, he may not. That the secrets are there, who but a fool can doubt; it is only Signor Macaroni's power of disinterested revelation that causes my unworthy scepticism.

And so let us come back to the Kid, and the strange thing that happened in a recently captured German dug-out on the night of which I have been writing. It was just as he had decided—rain or no rain—to lie down and sleep in the mud and filth—anywhere, anything, as long as he could sleep—that suddenly out of the darkness ahead he heard the Adjutant's voice, and knew that he had found the battalion. With almost a sob of thankfulness at the unexpected finish to his worries, he hailed him.

"Hullo! is that you, Kid?" The Adjutant loomed out of the darkness. "We thought you were lost for good. Are you cooked?"

"I'm just about done in," answered the boy. "Where is B Company?"

"I'll show you. It's the hell of a place to find even by day; but you've got 'some' dug-out. Beer, and tables, and beds; in fact, it's the first dug-out I've seen that in any way resembles the descriptions one reads in the papers."

"Well, as long as I can get to sleep, old man, I don't care a damn if it's the Ritz or a pigsty." The Kid plucked his foot from a mud-hole, and squelched on behind the Adjutant.

Now much has been written about German dug-outs—their size, their comfort, the revolving book-cases, the four-poster beds. Special mention has frequently been made of cellars full of rare old vintages, and of concreted buttery hatches; of lifts to take stout officers to the ground, and of portable derricks to sling even stouter ones into their scented valises. In fact, such stress has been laid upon these things by people of great knowledge, that I understand an opinion is prevalent amongst some earnest thinkers at home that when a high German officer wishes to surrender he first sends up two dozen of light beer on the lift to placate his capturers, rapidly following himself with a corkscrew. This may or may not be so; personally, I have had no such gratifying experience. But then, personally, I have generally been hard put to it to recognise the dug-outs of reality from the dug-outs of the daily papers. Most of them are much the same as any ordinary, vulgar English dug-out;

many are worse; but one or two undoubtedly are very good. In places where the nature of the ground has lent itself to deep work, and the lines have been stagnant for many moons, the Huns have carried out excellent work for the suitable housing of their officers. And it was down the entrance of one of these few and far between abodes that the Kid ultimately staggered, with the blessed feeling in his mind of rest at last. Round a table in the centre sat the other officers of B Company, discussing the remains of a very excellent German repast. As he came in they all looked up.

"The lost sheep," sang out the Captain cheerfully. "Come on, my kidlet, draw up, and put your nose inside some beer."

"Not a bad place, is it?" chimed in the Doctor, puffing at a large and fat cigar of Hun extraction. "Excellent cellar of rare old ale, cigars of great potency—real genuine Flor de Boche—a picture gallery of—er—a pleasing description, and a bed. What more can man desire?"

"Private MacPherson does not approve, I fear me, of the pictures," chuckled the senior subaltern. "I heard him muttering dark things about 'painted Jezebels,' and 'yon scarlet women of Babylon.'"

"It must be very dreadful for all concerned to go through life with a mind like MacPherson's." The Doctor was examining his cigar doubtfully. "There is an obstruction in this. It's either going to explode with great force in a minute, or else I'm coming to the motto. Hi! you blighter——" he jumped up

hurriedly to avoid the stream of beer that shot across the table from the Kid's overturned glass.

"Idiot child." The Company Commander roused himself from his gentle doze to contemplate the delinquent. Then he smiled. "Man, he's asleep; the boy's beat to a frazzle."

"Aye, you're right. Tim, come off that bed; the Kid is fair cooked. Wake up, infant." The Doctor shook him by the shoulder. "Wake up. Take off your boots, and then get down to it on the bed."

The Kid sat up blinking. "I'm very sorry," he said after a moment. "Did I upset the beer?"

"You did—all over me," laughed the Doctor. "Get your boots off and turn in."

"I'm so cursed sleepy." The Kid was removing his sodden puttees. "I've walked, and walked, and I'm just about——" He straightened himself in his chair, and as he did so the words died away on his lips. With a peculiar fixed look he stared past the Doctor into the corner of the dug-out. "My God!" he whispered at last, "what are you doing here?"

A sudden silence settled on the mess, and instinctively everybody, including the Doctor, glanced towards the corner. Then the Doctor turned once more to the boy, and his glance was the glance of his profession.

"What's the matter, Kid?" His tone was abrupt, even to curtness. "Did you think you saw something?"

"I thought—I thought——" The boy passed h

hand over his forehead. "I'm sorry—I must have been dreaming. It's gone now. I suppose I'm tired." But his eyes still searched the dug-out fearfully.

"What did you think you saw?" asked the Doctor shortly.

"I thought I saw——" Once again he stopped; then he laughed a little shakily. "Oh! it doesn't matter what I thought I saw. Damn it! I'm tired; let me turn in."

The Doctor's eye met the Company Commander's over the table, and he shrugged his shoulders slightly. "Dead beat." His lips framed the words, and he returned to the contemplation of his cigar, which was not doing all that a well-trained cigar should.

The Kid stood up and glanced round the mess at his brother officers a little shamefacedly; only to find them engrossed—a trifle ostentatiously—in their own business. "I'm sorry, you fellows," he blurted out suddenly. "Forgive me being such a fool; I suppose I'm a bit tired."

The Doctor took him firmly by the arm, and led him towards the bed. "Look here, old soul," he remarked, "if you wish to avoid the wrath of my displeasure, you will cease talking and go to bed. Every one knows what it is to be weary; and there's only one cure—sleep."

The Kid laughed and threw himself on the bed. "Jove!" he muttered sleepily; "then it's a pleasant medicine, Doctor dear." He pulled a blanket over his shoulders; his head touched the pillow; his

eyes closed; and before the Doctor had resumed his seat the Kid was asleep.

. . . . .

It seemed only a minute afterwards that he was awake again, staring into the dim-lit dug-out with every sense alert. He was conscious first of a faint elusive scent—a scent which was new to him. His mind wandered to the scents he knew—Chaminade, Mystérieuse, Trèfle Incarnat—but this was different. Delicate, sensuous, with the slightest suggestion of jasmine about it, it seemed to permeate every part of him. Vaguely expectant, he waited for something that he knew must happen. What it would be, he had no idea; he felt like a man waiting for the curtain to rise on a first night, when the music of the overture is dying away to a finish. He experienced no fear: merely an overwhelming curiosity to witness the drama, and to confirm his certainty about the owner of the scent. In his mind there was no doubt as to who she was. It was the girl he had seen in the corner as he was taking off his puttees: the girl who had looked at him with eyes that held the sadness of the world and its despair in them; the girl who had vanished so quickly. Her disappearance did not strike him as peculiar; she would explain when she came. And so the Kid waited for the drop-scene to lift.

It struck him as he glanced round the dug-out that the furniture had been moved. The table seemed nearer the wall; the chairs were differently arranged. Instead of the remnants of a finished meal, papers arranged in neat piles met his eye. The place looked

more like an office than a mess. Suddenly he stiffened into attention; steps were coming down the entrance to the dug-out. A man came in, and with a gasp the Kid recognised a German soldier. He strove to shout—to warn his brother officers who he knew were peacefully sleeping in valises on the floor; but no sound came. His tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth; he could only watch, rigid and motionless.

The German moved to the hanging lamp, and turned it up till a bright light flooded the dug-out.

"Now," the Kid's brain was racing, "he must see them. My God! they must have got back during the night."

But no. The German servant moved towards the cupboard which contained the food, brushing so close to the bed that the Kid could have touched him with ease as he passed. Very cautiously he raised his head as he saw the man, his back turned, fumbling on the shelves, and looked round the room. Then with the icy hand of terror clutching at his heart he lay back again. The room was empty; his brother officers had gone—murdered probably—and with him it could only be a question of moments before he too was discovered.

For an instant he had a wild idea of hurling himself upon the German: of taking him unawares—of trying to escape. Then the soldier turned: the opportunity had passed, and once again the silent spectator on the bed lay rigid. The servant, stolid and unemotional, moved heavily about the dug-out, laying the table for a meal. Once it seemed to the Kid that he looked

straight at him; he could have sworn that he must have been seen; and yet—apparently not. The man gave no sign, and it occurred to the Kid that perhaps he was lying in the shadow. Stealthily he wormed himself even nearer the wall: impelled by the instinct of self-preservation that would put off to the last possible moment the inevitable discovery. And hardly had he edged himself in against the wall, when with a sinking heart he heard voices outside: voices which spoke in German. With only the servant to tackle, somehow he had not felt so hopeless; now he knew the end had come.

Two officers entered, wiping the perspiration from their foreheads. One from his badges of rank he recognised as a Colonel—the other was a Lieutenant; and the discussion was—as far as their difference of rank allowed—obviously of an acrimonious nature. The Kid listened intently; thanking Heaven, not for the first time in his life, that some one with a grain of common sense had had him taught French and German by a method other than the Public School one. The predilection of his aunt's gardener for pens, ink, and paper would not have helped him much in that conversation.

"Beer, you fool," grunted the Colonel to the stolid servant. "Then, go."

Impatiently he waited till the orderly's footsteps died away, and then he turned savagely on the other officer.

"I tell you, Lieutenant Rutter, we *must* know," he snarled. "A girl—what is a girl, when big

issues are at stake? There are many more girls, Lieutenant Rutter; many more girls. Be very careful lest not only does this one die, but you also meet with an accident. Dead men cannot make love to those other girls." He banged his fist on the table and glared at the Lieutenant, who was staring moodily in front of him.

"I know that, Excellency," he returned after a moment. "But there is a proverb about bringing a horse to the water and not being able to make him drink."

"Bah! There are methods, my friend, of drowning the brute with water, if it won't drink willingly. And those methods will have to be adopted in this case."

"They are doubtless effective in killing the horse; but they will not lead us very much farther in our inquiries."

"Which is the reason why I have allowed you so much rope. I know as well as you do that willing information is worth ten times as much as when it is forced. You have made love to the girl, you have been playing the fool for six weeks with her, and we are no nearer than when we started." He sneered openly. "Since when have we become so dilatory, my friend? You seem to have lost your form with the fair sex."

The Lieutenant flushed, and his fist clenched. "Don't mention those others. I love this girl."

"No doubt thinking of marriage?" The sneer was even more in evidence.

"Yes, Excellency, I am thinking of marriage." His voice was ominously quiet.

"I am afraid, Lieutenant Rutter, it will remain in the beautiful and nebulous realms of thought, unless——" He paused and drained his beer ostentatiously, though all the while his eyes never left his companion's face.

"Unless," repeated the Lieutenant drearily, "she agrees to do some charming and honourable spying work for us on the other side of the lines."

"You speak very strangely, Lieutenant Rutter." The little pig eyes of the senior officer glinted menacingly. "Have a care."

"Pardon, Excellency. For the moment I forgot." With a weary gesture he got up. "I will ask her this morning." He looked at his watch. "She should be here very soon."

"Then I will await the result of your interview through here." The Colonel moved to a door half concealed by a curtain. "You shall have your turtle dove, Rutter, in peace and quiet." He chuckled harshly. "You know what we want?"

"By heart, Excellency."

"And you remember that her brother the Comte is not really dead. For our purposes he is a prisoner."

"I am not likely to forget; but I warn you, Excellency, I have but little hope of succeeding."

The Colonel's jaw shut like a vice. "Then God help you both, my friend; God help you both." His voice was soft, but horribly menacing; and as the curtain dropped behind him, the Kid, who had

been listening spellbound, understood for the first time the type of man who represented Prussian militarism.

Instinctively his heart warmed towards the Lieutenant, who with a weary gesture of despair was resting his head on his arms. He was young, clean cut, almost an Englishman to look at, save for his close-cropped bristling hair; and, moreover, he was up against it. All the Kid's sporting instincts rose within him. Boche or no Boche this was not the type of swine who launched gas and liquid fire on a horror-struck world. Forgetful of everything he was on the point of going over to him and telling him to stick it out, when his eyes rested on the entrance. And there was the girl: the girl he had seen in the corner, the girl of the jasmine scent. For a while she stood watching the bowed figure at the table, and then she tip-toed across to him and laid her hand on his head.

With a quick start he looked up, and into his face there came the light of all the ages, the light of the man for the woman he loves.

"Marie," he whispered hoarsely. "Marie—*que je t'adore.*" He caught her to him and kissed her on the lips. Then, with a bitter groan, he pushed her away and sat down again.

"Fritz, what is it?" she cried in wondering tones. "You sent for me, my dear. Why? I came; but it is not right for me to come to you here—in your dug-out."

"I was ordered to send for you, my Marie." His French was pure if guttural.

"Ordered!" An adorable look of amazement came on her face. "And you liked not this order, my Fritz. But why? It is not right for me to be here, I know; but now that I have come, it is very nice, *mon ami*. Why do you look so glum?"

For a while he did not reply, but paced the dug-out with long, uneven steps. And the Kid, watching his lady of the jasmine, saw her bite her lips, as a look of puzzled fear came into her great round eyes. At last the man paused in front of her and took her roughly by the arms, so that she cried out.

"You love me, Marie?" he demanded hoarsely. "You love me enough to marry me when this accursed war is over?" His voice sank over the last few words, and he glanced, half fearfully, at the curtained door.

"But of course, my Fritz," she answered softly. "You have been good to me, and you are different to these others. Mon Dieu! they frighten me—those harsh, brutal men; but they have been good to me and the little mother for your sake. It is terrible, I suppose—a French girl and a German officer; but the little god Love, *mon ami*, he laughs at the great god Mars—sometimes. Poor little me—I cannot help myself." She laughed adorably, and the Kid laughed with her. She seemed to him like the spirit of the Spring, when the bluebells are flowering and the world is young. But on the German's face there was no answering smile. It was set and stern, and imprinted with a look of such utter hopelessness that the Kid, who saw it over

the girl's shoulder, almost cried out with the pain of it.

"Do you love me enough, Marie," he went on at length, "to do a big thing for me—a very big thing?"

"That depends on what it is." She spoke gaily, but the Kid could see her body stiffen slightly. "I'm no good at big things."

"Will you go to Paris for me?" His voice was dull and jerky.

"Paris!" She gazed at him in amazement. "But how, and why?"

"It will be easy to get you there." He seized on the part of her question which postponed for a few seconds the hideous thing he was to ask her. "We can arrange all that quite easily. You see——" He rambled on with the method of making plans for the journey, until he caught her eyes, and the look in them made his faltering words die away to a dreadful silence.

"And why do you want me to go to Paris, Fritz?" Her voice was hardly above a whisper.

Twice he essayed to speak; twice he failed to do more than falter her name. Then with a gasping cry he took her in his arms and kissed her passionately. "They shan't," he muttered; "by God! they shan't." And it was as the Kid watched the scene, with parted lips and quickened breath, that the curtain moved aside, and he saw the Colonel, like an evil spirit, regarding the pair with cold malevolence.

"Delightful!" he remarked after a few moments of cynical observation; "delightful! Lieutenant

Rutter, you are to be congratulated. Mademoiselle—you are charming; all that my young friend has said, and more."

He moved forward and stood by the table, while Marie—her face as white as death—clung to her lover. "Who is he, Fritz, this ugly old man?" she whispered terrified.

"Permit me to introduce to you . . ." Fritz forced the words from his dry lips, only to stop at the upraised hand of the other.

"My name, dear young lady, is immaterial," he remarked genially. "Just an ugly old man, who has had no time to bask in the sunshine of the smiles of your charming sex." He sat down and lit a cigar. "So you are going to become a German's wife! Ah, Fritz, my boy, you're a lucky dog! You'll have to guard your Marie carefully from the rest of the garrison, when we have finally won and the war is over." He gave a grating laugh, and blew out a cloud of smoke.

"What do you want of me?" asked Marie, in a terrified whisper, looking at him like a bird at a snake.

"A little service, my dear young Fräulein to be—a little service to the Fatherland. You must not forget that Germany is now your country in spirit, if not in actual truth. You are pledged to her just as you are pledged to your Fritz—in fact, he being an officer, the two are one and the same thing." He smiled again, and waved his cigar gently in the air. "And not only will your service benefit the country

that you have chosen as your own, but it will benefit you, because it will bring the end of the war, and with it your marriage, closer."

He paused to let the words sink in, but she still watched him fascinated.

"One thing more." His eyes gleamed dully through the haze of smoke as he fixed them on her. "Unless this little service is fulfilled, though it won't make any difference to the ultimate result as far as Germany is concerned, it will make a very considerable difference as far as you and—er—Fritz are concerned."

"What do you mean?" The girl hardly breathed the words.

"I mean that there will be no marriage. Painful —but true."

The Kid watched the young officer's arm tighten convulsively round her waist—and began to see red. Then the harsh guttural voice continued. "Well, now, without wasting any more time, let us come to the point. I had proposed to let Lieutenant Rutter explain things to you; but—er—from one or two things I overheard, it struck me he might not make them clear." The beady eyes came slowly round to the Lieutenant. "That is why I interrupted." Once again he stared at the trembling girl. "To be brief, Mademoiselle Marie, we anticipate an attack—a big attack—by the English. We have good information that it is coming in this neighbourhood."

The Kid pricked up his ears; what the devil was the man talking about? "We have every reason to

hope that Ovillers, Fricourt, Thiepval are impregnable; at the same time—in war—one never leaves things to chance." The Kid's astonishment turned to stupefaction; he himself had been in the storming of Ovillers. "And the chance," continued the imperturbable voice, "in this matter is the probable action of the French—your charming compatriots—er—compatriots, *that were*, Fräulein. We anticipate this offensive in about a month or six weeks; and the matter on which we require all the confirmation we can is whether the French, after their hideous losses at Verdun, can play any important part in this operation of the enemy. That is where you can help us."

For a moment there was dead silence, and then the girl turned her stricken face to the man beside her. "Dear God!" she muttered, "is this why you made love to me? To make me a spy?"

"Marie—no, on my honour; I swear it!" Forgetful of the man sitting at the table Fritz stretched out his hand in an agony of supplication.

"Lieutenant Rutter." With a snarl the Colonel stood up. "You forget yourself. I am speaking. A truce to this fooling. Mademoiselle"—he turned again on the girl—"we have other things to do beside babble of love. Call it spying if you will, but we want information, and you can help us to get it—*must* help us to get it."

"And what if I refuse?" Superbly she confronted him; her voice had come back; her head was thrown up.

"In the first place you will not marry Lieutenant Rutter; and in the second place—have you heard that the Comte de St. Jean was taken prisoner at Verdun?"

"Philippe. Oh, monsieur, where is he?" The girl threw herself on her knees before him. "I implore you—he is my only brother."

"Indeed. Well, if you ever desire to see him again you will carry out my suggestion. Otherwise——" he paused significantly.

"Oh, you could not! You could not be so cruel, so vile as to harm him if he is a prisoner. It would break my mother's heart."

"Mademoiselle, there is nothing which I would scruple to do—nothing—if by so doing I advanced the glorious cause of our Fatherland." The man's small eyes gleamed with the fire of a fanatic; revolting though he was, yet was there an element of grandeur about him. Even the Kid, watching silently from the bed, felt conscious of the power which seemed to spring from him as he stood there, squat and repulsive, with the lovely French girl kneeling at his feet. He saw her throw her arms around his knees, and turn up her face to his in an agony of pleading; and then of a sudden came the tragedy.

Discipline or no discipline, a man is a man, and Fritz Rutter had reached the breaking-point. Perhaps it was the sight of the woman he loved kneeling at the feet of one of the grossest sensualists in Europe, perhaps—— But who knows?

"Marie," he cried hoarsely, "it's not true. Philippe

is dead; they cannot hurt him now. Get up, my dear, get up." With folded arms he faced the other man as the girl staggered to her feet. Heedless of the blazing passion on the Colonel's face, she crept to Fritz and hid her face against his chest. And as she stood there she heard the voice of her tormentor, thick and twisted with hate.

"For that, Lieutenant Rutter, I will have you disgraced. And then I will look after your Marie. Orderly!" His voice rose to a shout as he strode to the door.

"Good-bye, my love." Fritz strained her to him, and the Kid saw her kiss him once on the lips. Then she disengaged herself from his arms, and walked steadily to where the Colonel still shouted up the entrance. Outside there was the sound of many footsteps, and the girl paused just behind the cursing maniac in the door.

"So you will look after me, will you, monsieur?" Her voice rose clear above the noise, and the man turned round, his malignant face quivering. The Kid watched it fascinated, and suddenly he saw it change. "I think not," went on the same clear voice; and the guttural cry of fear rang out simultaneously with the sharp crack of a revolver.

"My God!" Rutter stood watching the crumpling figure as it slipped to the ground in front of the girl; and then with a great cry he sprang forward. And with that cry, which seemed to ring through his brain, there came the power of movement to the Kid. He hurled himself off the bed towards the girl

—his girl—his lady of the jasmine. But he was too late. The second shot was even truer than the first, and as her head hit the floor she was dead.

Regardless of Rutter the Kid knelt down beside her, and as he did so, he got it—in the face.

"What the blazes are you doing?" roared an infuriated voice. "Damn you! you young fool—you've nearly killed me."

Stupefied the boy looked around. The same dug-out; the same officers of B company; the same beer bottles; but where was the lady of the jasmine? Where was the man who lay dead in the doorway? Where was Rutter?

He blinked foolishly, and looked round to find the lamp still burning and his brother officers roaring with laughter. All, that is, except the Doctor on whose stomach he had apparently landed.

But the Kid was not to be put off by laughter. "I tell you it happened in this very dug-out," he cried excitedly. "She killed the swine in the doorway there, and then she killed herself. This is where she fell, Doc, just where you're lying, and her head hit the wall there. Look, there's a board there, nailed over the wall—where her head went. Don't laugh, you fool! don't laugh—it happened. I dreamed it. I know that now; but it happened for all that—before the big advance. I tell you she had light golden hair—ah! look." The Doctor had prised off the board, and there on the wall an ominous red stain showed dull in the candlelight. Slowly the Doctor bent down and picked up something with

his fingers. Getting up he laid it on the table. And when the officers of B Company had looked at it, the laughter ceased. It was a little wisp of light golden hair—and the end was thick and clotted.

"To-morrow, Kid, you can tell us the yarn," said the Doctor quietly. "Just now you're going to have a quarter-grain of sleep dope and go to bed again."

. . . . .

The following evening the officers of B Company, less the Kid, who was out, sat round the table and talked.

"What do you make of it, Doc?" asked the Company Commander. "Do you really think there is anything in the Kid's yarn? I mean, we know he dreamed it—but do you think it's true? I suppose that tired as he was he would be in a receptive mood for his imagination to run riot."

For a long while the Doctor puffed stolidly at his pipe without answering. Then he leaned forward and put his hand in his pocket.

"Imagination, you say. Do you call that imagination?" He produced the lock of hair from a match-box. "Further, do you call that imagination? I found it under the pillow this morning." On the table beside the match-box he placed a small pocket handkerchief, and from it there came the faint, elusive scent of jasmine. "And last of all, do you call that imagination? I found it in one of the books yonder." He placed an old envelope in front of him, and the others crowded round. It was addressed to Ober-Lieutenant Fritz Rutter.

VI

MORPHIA

The man stirred uneasily, and a faint moan came from his lips. A numbness seemed to envelop his body from the waist downwards, and in the intervals of a stabbing pain in his head, he seemed to hear people whispering near by. A figure passed close to him, the figure of a girl with fair hair, in a grey dress—the figure of a girl like Molly. A red-hot iron stabbed his brain; his teeth clenched on his lips; he fought with all his will, but once again he moaned; he couldn't help it—it was involuntary. The girl stopped and came towards him; she was speaking to him, for he heard her voice. But what was she saying? Why did she speak so indistinctly? Why—ah, but her hand on his forehead was cool. It seemed to quiet those raging devils in his head; it helped him, as Molly always helped him. It seemed to—why, surely, it must be Molly herself, with her dear, soft touch, and her lips ready to kiss, and the sweet smell of her hair mounting to his brain like wine. Something pricked his arm: something that felt like the needle of a syringe; something that . . . But anyway, what the deuce was she doing? Then

suddenly he recalled that pin at the back of her dress, where he'd pricked his wrist so badly the first time he'd kissed her.

He laughed gently at the remembrance; and the hand on his forehead trembled. For laughter to be a pleasant thing to hear it is essential that the person who laughs should be in full possession of—well, it is better, at any rate, that his head should not have been hit by a bomb, especially if it was his lower jaw that bore the brunt.

"What are you trembling for, Molly?" The voice was tender. "The pain has quite gone—I must have had a touch of the sun."

But for a question to be answered it must be audible; and the girl whose hand was on his forehead heard no words. Merely was there a great and wonderful pity in her eyes, for the remnant—the torn-up remnant—who had fought and suffered for her. And the remnant, well, he was way back in the Land of Has-been. Did I not say that the pin was at the back of Molly's waist?

The woods were just at their best, with the glorious yellow and brown of early autumn, touched with the gold of the setting sun. In a clearing a boy was sitting on a fallen tree-trunk, puffing furiously at a cigarette. Twice had the smoke gone the wrong way, and once had it got into his eyes; but when one is aged sixteen such trifles are merely there to be overcome. The annoying thing was that he was

still engaged in absorbing the overflowing moisture from his eyes, with a handkerchief of doubtful cleanliness, when a girl came into the glade and started to laugh.

"There's no good pretending, Billy. The smoke has got into your eyes, and your handkerchief is dirty, and you aren't impressing me in the slightest."

"Hallo, Molly! I wasn't expecting you so soon." The smoker looked a little sheepish.

"Indeed! Then if I'm not wanted, I'll go away again."

"No, no, Molly—don't do that." The boy rose eagerly, and went towards her. Then he stopped awkwardly, and putting his hands in his pocket, fidgeted with his feet.

"Well—why not?" The girl smiled provokingly. "And what are you hopping about for? Are you going to try to learn to dance, as I suggested?"

"I will if you will teach me, Molly—dear." He took a step forward eagerly—and then paused again, aghast at the audacity of that "dear." Something in the cool, fresh young girl standing so easily in front of him, smiling with faint derision, seemed to knock on the head all that carefully thought out plan which had matured in his mind during the silent watches of the previous night. It had all seemed so easy then. Johnson major's philosophy on life in general and girls in particular was one thing in the abstract, and quite another when viewed in the concrete, with a real, live specimen to practice on. And yet Johnson major was a man of much

experience—and a prefect of some standing at school.

"My dear fellows," he had said on one occasion when holding the floor in his study, "I don't want to brag, and *we* do not speak about these things." The accent on the *we* had been wonderful. It implied membership of that great body of youthful daredevils to whom the wiles of women present no terrors. "But women, my dear fellows, why—good lord, there's nothing in it when one knows the way to manage them. They adore being kissed—provided it's done the right way. And if you don't know the right way instinctively, it comes with practice, old boy, it comes with practice." Billy had listened in awe, though preserving sufficient presence of mind to agree with the speaker in words of suitable nonchalance.

Of course, Johnson major must have been right; but, devil take it, there seemed remarkably little instinct available at the present moment; and up to date in Billy's career, practice in the proper procedure had been conspicuous by its absence.

"I think you're rather dull to-day." The girl was speaking again, and there was more than a hint of laughter in her voice. "What's the matter with you? Has that cigarette made you feel sick?"

"Certainly not. I—er—oh, Molly, I——"

The desperate words trembled on his lips—trembled and died away under the laughter in her eyes.

"Yes?" she murmured inquiringly. "What is it, Billy?"

Oh, woman, woman! Just sixteen, but at two you have learned the beginnings of the book of Eve.

"I—er—I—oh, dash it, let's go for a walk!" With a gasp of relief he swung on his heel; the fatal plunge had been put off for a little; he hadn't made a fool of himself—yet, at any rate. "Do you mind if I smoke?"

"Not if you don't." The girl was walking demurely beside him, down the narrow lane carpeted with its first layers of auburn brown. "Are you sure it's wise? Two so close together might not be good for you."

Two close together—not good for him! Absurd; it was nothing to what he was accustomed to, and yet—why, his head was throbbing, throbbing as he looked at the girl beside him? What was that distant noise like the slow beating of a mighty drum, that seemed to quiver and vibrate in the air till it filled his brain with a great rush of sound, and then sobbed away into silence? What was the matter with his right hand that it burned and twitched so ceaselessly? Surely he hadn't burnt himself with the cigarette! He looked down to see, but somehow things were indistinct. It almost seemed as if he hadn't got a hand; the woods were hazy—Molly seemed far away. In her place was a man, a man with a stubby growth on his chin, a man who bent over him and muttered something.

"Gawd, Ginger, the poor devil ain't dead neither! Lift him up carefully. There's his right arm over there, and his back—— Oh, my gawd! Poor devil!"

Thus had the battalion stretcher-bearers found him the day before. . . .

The man became irritable.

"Go away at once! Can't you see I'm with a lady. Molly, dear, where are you? What is this dirty-looking fellow doing here at all?"

But Molly for the moment seemed aloof. He saw her there, standing in the path in front of him—so close and yet somehow so curiously far away.

"Molly, do you hear that noise—that strange beating in the air? I think I'm going to be ill. Perhaps two close together are too much."

But no—apparently not. Suddenly everything was clear again, and there was Molly with the autumn wind blowing the soft tendrils of hair back from the nape of her neck; Molly, with the skirt that betokens the half-way period between flapperhood and coming out; Molly, with her lithe young figure half turned from him as she watched the sun sinking over the distant hills.

"They adore being kissed." The words of the wonderful Johnson major were ringing in his brain as he watched her, and suddenly something surged up within him. What matter rules and theories? What matter practice? There is only one way to kiss a girl, and rules and theories avail not one jot. With a quick step he had her in his arms, and, with his pulses hammering with the wonder of it, he watched her face come round to his. He kissed her cheek, her eyes, her mouth—shyly at first, and then with gathering confidence as a boy should kiss a girl.

The sweetness of it, the newness of it, the eternal joy of a woman in a man's arms for the first time! Surely it had never been quite like that with any one else before. Of course, other people kissed, but—this was different. Suddenly the girl disengaged her arms and wound them gently round his neck. She pulled his head towards her, and kissed him again and again, while he felt her heart beating against his coat.

"Billy, my dear!"

Almost he missed the whispered words coming faintly from somewhere in the neighbourhood of his tie.

"Molly—Molly, darling—I love you!"

The boy's voice was shaky, his grip almost crushed her.

"Do you, Billy? I'm so glad! I want you to love me, because—because——"

She looked at him shyly.

"Say it, sweatheart, say it." He held her at arm's-length—no longer bashful, no longer wondering whether he dared; but insistent, imperious, a young god for the moment. "Because what?"

"Because I love you too, you darling!"

Once again she was in his arms, once again did time cease, while the lengthening shadows stole softly towards them; and a squirrel, emboldened by their stillness, watched for a while with indulgent eyes.

At last the girl gently turned away, and the boy's arms fell to his side.

"Molly, you've got a pin in your waistband. Look, you've pricked my wrist."

"Billy, my dear, let me do it up. Why didn't you tell me, you poor old boy?"

"I didn't notice it, I didn't even feel it, you darling."

The boy laughed gladly as she bound his handkerchief round the wounded arm; and, bending forward, kissed her neck, just where the hair left it, just where—but what had happened? Where was she? She had gone, the trees had gone, the sun had set, and it was dark, terribly dark.

Once again that mighty drum beat close by, and voices came dimly through a haze to the man's brain. Some one was touching him, a finger was probing gently over his head, a sentence came to him as if from a vast distance.

"Good God! Poor devil! If we have to go we must leave him. Any movement would kill him at once."

"I won't have you touching the bandage that Molly has put on!" said the man angrily. "My wrist will be quite all right; it's absurd to make a fuss about a pin-prick."

And perhaps because there are sounds to which no man can listen unmoved, the quiet-faced doctor drew out his hypodermic syringe. The girl with the grey dress, her steps lagging a little with utter physical weariness, paused at the foot of his bed, and waited with an encouraging smile.

"Molly," he cried eagerly, "come and talk to me! I've been dreaming about you."

But she merely continued to smile at him, though in her eyes there was the sadness of a divine pity. Then once again something pricked his arm. A great silence seemed to come down on him like a pall, a silence that was tangible, in which strange faces passed before him in a jumbled procession. They seemed to swing past like fishes drifting across the glass window of an aquarium—ghostly, mysterious, and yet very real. A man in a dirty grey uniform, with a bloodstained bandage round his forehead, who leered at him; Chilcote, his company commander, who seemed to be shouting and cheering and waving his arm; a sergeant of his platoon, with a grim smile on his face, who held a rifle with a fixed bayonet that dripped.

"All right, Chilcote," he shouted, "we'll have the swine out in a minute!"

But Chilcote had gone, and through the silence came a muffled roar.

"The drum again!" he muttered irritably. "What the devil is the good of trying to surprise the Huns if we have the band with us! You don't want a band when you're attacking a village! A band is for marching to, and dancing, not for fighting." Of course, if it was going to continue playing, they might just as well have a dance, and be done with it. He laughed a little. "You've had too much champagne for supper, my boy," he soliloquised. "What do you mean by 'might as well have a dance'? Can't you see that awe-inspiring gentleman in the red coat is on the point of striking up now?"

He looked across the room, a room that seemed a trifle hazy, and thought hard. Surely he hadn't had too much to drink, and yet the people were so vague and unreal? And why the deuce did a ballroom band have a big drum? He gave it up after a moment, and silently watched the scene.

He remembered now quite clearly, and with an amused laugh at his momentary forgetfulness, he looked at his programme. The third supper extra was just beginning, and two dances after that he had four in succession with Molly—the fateful hour when he had determined to try his luck.

At present she was having supper with a nasty-looking man, with long hair and an eyeglass, who was reputed to be a rising politician, in the running for an under-secretaryship, and was also reputed to be in love with Molly. He looked savagely round the room, and, having failed to discover them, he strolled to the bar to get a drink.

"Hallo, Billy; not dancing? She loves me; she loves me not! Cheer up, dearie!"

An inane-looking ass raised his whisky-and-soda to his lips with a fatuous cackle.

"I wonder they don't have a home for people like you, Jackson," remarked Billy curtly. "Whisky-and-soda, please."

He gave his order to the waiter and lit a cigarette. He hardly heard what the irrepressible Jackson was saying, but allowed him to babble on in peace while his thoughts centred on Molly. How absolutely sweet she was looking in that shimmering, gauzy

stuff that just went with her hair, and showed off her figure to perfection! If only she said "yes," he'd arrange the party going back in the cars so that he got her alone in the two-seater. If only—good lord, would the dance never come?

He looked up, and saw her passing into the ballroom with her supper partner; and, as he did so, she looked half round and caught his eye. Just a second, no more; but on her lips had trembled the faintest suspicion of a smile—a smile that caused his heart to beat madly with hope, a smile that said things. He sat back in his chair and the hand that held his glass trembled a little.

"I don't believe you've been listening to me, Billy." The egregious Jackson emitted a plaintive wail. "I don't believe you've heard a word I said."

"Perfectly correct in both statements, dear boy!" Billy rose abruptly to his feet and smacked him on the back. "One must give up something in Lent, you know."

"But it isn't Lent." Jackson looked aggrieved. "And you've made me spill my drink."

But he spoke to the empty air and a melancholy waiter, for Billy was back in the ballroom, waiting. . . .

"You smiled at me, lady, a while ago," he said softly in her ear, as they swung gently through the crowded room. "I thought it was a smile that said things. Was thy servant very presumptuous in thus reading his queen's glance? Confound you, sir; that's my back!"

He glared furiously at a bull-necked thruster in a pink coat.

"Hush, Billy!" laughed the girl, as they lost him in the crowd. "That's our master!"

"I don't care a hang who he is, but he's rammed one of my brace-buttons into my spine! He's the sort of man who knocks you down and tramples on your face, after supper!"

For a few moments they continued in silence, perhaps the two best dancers in the room, and gradually she seemed to come closer to him, to give herself up entirely to him, until, as in a dream, they moved like one being and the music softly died away. For a moment the man stood still, pressing the girl close to him, and then, with a slight sigh that was almost one of pain, he let her go.

"Are you glad I taught you to dance?" she asked laughingly; while the room shouted for an encore.

"Glad," he whispered, "glad! Ah! my lady, my lady, to dance with you is the nearest approach to heaven that we poor mortals may have. For all that"—he steered her swiftly through the expectant couples towards a door covered with a curtain —"I want an answer to a question I asked you just before my spine was broken!" He held up the curtain for her to pass through, and piloted her to an easy-chair hidden behind some screens in a discreetly lighted room. "Did your smile say things, my lady? Did you tell me something as you went into the ballroom with that long-haired lawyer?"

"My dear boy, I wasn't smiling at you! I was smiling at that nice Mr. Jackson man."

"Molly, you're a liar! You know you hate that ass; you told me so yourself yesterday!"

"All the more reason to smile at him. Billy, give me a cigarette." She leaned towards him slightly as he offered her his case, and their eyes met. Her breath came a little quicker as she read the message blazing out of his, and then she looked away again. "And a match, please," she continued quietly.

"Confound the match and the cigarette, too!" His voice was shaking. "Molly, Molly, I know I'm mad! I know it's just the height of idiocy from a so-called worldly point of view, but I can't help it. I've tried and struggled; I've been away for two years and haven't seen you. But, oh! my dear, the kisses you gave me when you were a flapper, before you came out, before your mother got this bee in her bonnet about some big marriage for you—those kisses are still burning my lips. I can feel them now, princess, and the remembrance of 'em drives me mad! I know I'm asking you to chuck your mother's ambitions; I know I've got nothing to offer you, except the old name, which doesn't count for much these days. But, oh! my lady, I just worship the very ground you walk on. Is there just a chance for me? I'd simply slave for you, if you'd let me!"

Through the closed door came stealing the soft music of a waltz, while from another corner came

the sound of a whispered tête-à-tête. Very still was the girl as she sat in the big arm-chair, with the man pleading passionately at her side. Once she caught her breath quickly when he recalled the time gone by—the time before her mother's political ambitions had ruthlessly waged war on her, and done their best to drive Nature out of her outlook on life; and, when he had finished speaking, she gave a little tired smile.

"Billy boy," she whispered, "is that how you've felt about it all this while?"

He made no answer, but, stretching out his hands, he took hold of her two wrists.

"You've really remembered those kisses when we were kids?" she went on softly.

"Remembered them? Dear heavens, my lady, I wouldn't lose that remembrance for untold wealth! It's been with me in Alaska; it's been with me in Hong Kong. I've woken up at nights with the feel of your lips on mine, and all the glory of you, and the sweetness; and it's helped me on when everything was black, and made things bright when the world was rotten!" With a bitter sigh he took his hands away and sat back in his chair. "And I've failed! Jove! the wild schemes and the plans, the golden visions and the Eldorados—all failed. Just a little money, just enough to have a burst in England, just enough to be able to see you. And then it slipped out. Lady, dear, I never meant to before I came to the Towers. I knew you were there, but I never meant to ask you. Wash it out, my princess; wash

it out ! I haven't said a word. You've been teaching me a new step ; let's go back and dance. I've been mad this evening, and, unless we go back and dance, I can't guarantee remaining sane ! "

But the girl made no move. With parted lips she swayed towards him, while he watched her, with the veins standing out on his forehead. " Billy—I don't care ; I'm mad, too ! " The scent she used was mounting to his brain—the nearness of her was driving him mad.

" Molly, get back to that ballroom ; get back quick, or——" He spoke through his clenched teeth.

" Or what, Billy boy ? " She smiled deliciously.

And then he kissed her : a kiss that seemed to draw her soul to her lips : a kiss that lifted him until he travelled through endless spaces in a great aching void where time and distance ceased, and nothing happened save a wonderful ecstasy, and ever and anon the mighty booming of a giant drum.

He seemed to be treading on air, and though the ballroom had vanished, and the discreet apartment with shaded lights had faded away, yet he was very conscious of the nearness of his girl. But just now, he could not see her—she eluded him, leaving an ever-present feeling that she would be waiting for him round the next of those intangible masses he seemed to be drifting through.

" You don't mind waiting, my princess ? " he murmured ceaselessly. " After this war it will all come right. Just now I've got to go—I must go out there ; but afterwards, it will all come right—

and we'll live in a house in the country and grow cabbages and pigs. You'll wait, you say? Ah! my dear, my dear; it's sweet of you; but perhaps you ought to have married the lawyer man. You might have been Mrs. Prime Minister one of these days."

For a while the tired brain refused to act; the man felt himself falling into unplumbed depths—depths which echoed with monstrous reverberations.

"Molly, where are you, dear? It's cold, and my head is throbbing to beat the band. If only that cursed drum would stop! Do you hear it echoing through the air? And the noise hurts—hurts like hell, Molly. Ah! Heaven, but it's cold; and I can't see you, my lady; I don't know where you are."

Once again he became conscious of figures moving around him. They seemed to be carrying motionless men past his feet—men on stretchers covered with blankets. With staring eyes he watched the proceeding, trying to understand what was happening. In front of him was a window in which the glass had been smashed, leaving great jagged pieces sticking out from the sides of the frame. He wondered vaguely why it had been left in such a dangerous condition; when he and Molly had their house such a thing would never be allowed to happen—if it did it would be mended at once. He asked one of the passing figures what had caused the damage, and when he got no answer he angrily repeated the question.

He fretted irritably because no one seemed to take

any notice of him, and suddenly his head began throbbing worse than ever. But the hazy indistinctness was gone; the man was acutely conscious of everything around him. Memory had come back, and he knew where he was and why he was there. He remembered the fierce artillery bombardment; he recalled getting over the parapet, out on to the brown shell-pocked earth, sodden and heavy with the drenching rain; he recalled the steady shamble over the ground with boots so coated with wet mud that they seemed to drag him back. Then clear in his mind came the picture of Chilcote cheering, shouting, lifting them on to the ruins of what once had been a village; he saw Chilcote falter, stop, and, with a curious spinning movement, crash forward on to his face; he saw the Germans—he saw fierce-faced men like animals at bay, snarling, fighting; he heard once again that trembling cry of "*Kamerade*"; and then—a blank. The amazing thing was that it was all jumbled up with Molly. He seemed to have been with her lately—and yet she couldn't have been out there with him. He puzzled a bit, and then gave it up: it hurt his head so terribly to think. He just lay still, gazing fixedly at the jagged, torn pane of glass. . . .

"They are all out, Doctor, except this one."

A woman was speaking close beside him, and his eyes slowly travelled round in the direction of the voice. It was another woman—a woman he hadn't seen before—swaying slightly as if she would drop.

"Good heavens! it's Billy Saunders!"

A man in khaki was bending over him—a man whom he recognised as a civilian doctor he'd known at home—a man, moreover, who knew Molly.

"Do you know me, old chap?"

"Of course," answered the man. "What's all the trouble?"

The doctor bit his lip, and the man noticed his hand clench hard. Then there started a low-voiced conversation, a conversation to which he listened attentively—his hearing seemed abnormally acute.

"Has he spoken since he's been in, sister?"

"No—only those dreadful moans. The whole of his face—absolutely hopeless—spinal cord."

The man lying motionless caught the disjointed words. What did they mean? They were mad—insane. Dying? He—Billy Saunders! What about Molly—his Molly? What about. . . . Gentle fingers once again touched his head, and, looking up, he saw the doctor's eyes fixed on his.

"They're shelling the hospital, dear old man; we've got to get—— Great Scott, look out!"

Like the moan of a giant insect, the shrill whine came through the air, rising to an overwhelming scream. There was a deafening crash—a great hole was torn in the wall just by the window with the jagged pane, and the room filled with stifling black fumes. A sudden agonising stab, and the man, looking up, saw Molly in front of him. She was standing in the acrid smoke—beckoning.

"I'm coming, dear, I'm coming!" he cried;

" it's good of you to have waited, girl of mine—so good."

. . . . .

" Are you hurt, sister ? " The doctor, who had been crouching by the bed, stood up.

" Not touched, thank you." She was white and shaking. " Did you hear the bits whizzing through the room ? "

" I did," remarked the doctor grimly, holding out an arm from which the blood already dripped. " And I felt one of them too. But there's no time to lose —I don't know what to do about him, poor old chap."

He turned once again to the bed, and even as he turned he knew that the decision had been made for him: and he thanked the Maker. Billy Saunders had also felt a bit—a jagged bit—through the heart.

VII

BENDIGO JONES—HIS TREE

My story—such as it is—concerns a camouflage tree and Bendigo Jones: both of which—or whom—will require a little more introduction. That Bendigo would indignantly repudiate any such necessity, I am fully aware; nevertheless, even at the risk of offending him, I propose to outline briefly his claims to greatness, before embarking on the incident in his military career which forms the subject of these pages.

First however—the camouflage tree. It is only meet that the material and sordid details of the stage properties should be given, before branching into any discussion of the capabilities of the actor. The phrase, then, does not imply—as the ignorant might possibly be led to believe—a new type of tree. It does not grow in the tropics amongst a riotous tangle of pungent undergrowth; it does not creak sadly in the north wind on the open hill. It shelters not the hibiscus anthropoid, it gives not lodging to the two-tailed newt. From a botanical point of view, the tree is a complete and utter frost. It is, in point of hard and bitter fact, not a tree at all.

"Camouflage" is that which conceals: it is a fraud, and speaketh not the truth. I am not even certain whether it is a noun or a preposition, but the point is immaterial. Along with other canons of military matters, its virtue lies in its application rather than in its etymology. What the eye doth not see the trench mortars do not trouble is as true to-day as when Noah first mentioned the fact; and camouflage is the application of this mighty dictum.

The value of any particular piece of camouflage depends entirely on its capability for deceit; but to the youthful enthusiast I would speak a word of warning. I have in mind the particular case of young Angus MacTaggart, a lad from Glasgow, with freckles and a sunny disposition. He was a sapper by trade, and on his shoulders there devolved, on one occasion, the job of covering a trench mortar emplacement with a camouflage of wire and grass which would screen the hole in which sat the mortar from the prying gaze of Hun aeroplanes. It was a deep hole, for the mortar was large; and the screen of wire was fastened to a framework of wood. When the gun wished to do its morning hate, a pessimistic individual first scoured the heavens with his glasses in search of Hun planes. If the scouring revealed nothing, the screen was lowered, and the gun was made ready. Then the detachment faded away, and the gun was fired by a man of great personal bravery by means of a long string. Ever since the first trench mortars, which consisted of a piece of piping down which a jam-tin bomb was dropped, in the hopes that

when the charge at the bottom was lighted, the bomb would again emerge, I have regarded trench mortars as dangerous and unpleasant objects, and the people who deal with them as persons of a high order of courage. One remembers the times when the bomb did not emerge, but stuck half way and exploded violently; one remembers when the entire gun fell over and propelled the bomb in the direction of battalion headquarters; above all, one remembers the loathing and contumely with which the mere arrival of the trench mortar in any part of the trenches was greeted. Then there was no attempt at camouflage; one's sole endeavour was to avoid being killed by the beastly thing.

To return, however, to Angus. Though of a sunny disposition, as I have said, he was a somewhat earnest individual—and thorough withal. He determined that as a camouflage, *his* should stand pre-eminent; it should be the model and pattern of all camouflages. He succeeded.

Labouring at night—largely with his own fair hands—he produced a screen cunningly woven with grasses and weeds which he swore would defy the most lynx-eyed pilot. He even went so far as to place in the centre of it a large bunch of nettles, which he contended gave it an air of insouciance and lightheartedness that had been lacking before.

Now, as I mentioned above, the value of camouflage depends on its capability for deceit; and it is by this criterion that I claim his work as a success. It should be added, however, in no uncertain tones,

that it is the Germans whom one is desirous of deceiving, and that is where my warning to the youthful enthusiast comes in.

The thing came too quickly for warning. Suddenly from above the inhabitants of the hole, with whom Angus was consuming a midday glass of port, was heard the voice: "It must be somewhere about here, sir, I think." The voice was right—it was.

They came through in a phalanx of fire, and descended abruptly on the detachment below. It was a magnificent compliment to the work, but it was unfortunate that the General should have been the one to consume the nettles. However, I have always thought that Angus's voice of disgust as he contemplated the wreckage of his screen did not improve matters.

"The door," he remarked, with painful distinctness, "is full of possibilities." With that he left.

I trust the moral of my digression is obvious. . . .

Having then, in a few well-chosen phrases, discussed one type of camouflage, I would pass on and lead the thirster for information still farther into the by-paths of knowledge. Just as there are many and divers types of deceit, varying from that which conceals what is, to that which exposes what is not—involved that last, but think it out—so are there many types of camouflage. And the particular one with which I am concerned, deals with a tree.

On a certain slight eminence in what was otherwise a flat and dreary outlook, there stood the stump of a tree. It was a tired stump, strongly reminiscent

of the morning after. It had had a hard life, and much of its pristine glory had faded. No longer did the sprightly sparrow chirrup cheerfully to its young from leafy branches; no longer did cattle recline in its shade during the heat of the day. It was just a stump—a stump complete with splinters.

Its sole claim to notoriety lay in its position. It commanded a view of the German lines which was not to be had elsewhere; in fact, from the eminence on which it stood you could obtain the only good observation of the opposite trenches in that particular sector of the line.

It was the Brigade Major who first suggested the idea in the fertile brain of the C.R.E. of the Division, who happened to be talking to him at the moment. They were in the support line trenches, and close to where they stood, the tree—gaunt, repulsive and toothpicky—raised its stunted head to heaven.

"What a pity that tree ain't hollow!" ruminated the Staff officer thoughtfully. "Splendid view from it of the Huns. Can't do anything in that line, can you, Colonel?"

The C.R.E. thoughtfully considered the proposition. "Afraid not, old boy," he answered after a few moments' deliberation. "Bit of a job hollowing out a tree. All the same, you're quite right. It would make a great O.P."

"Why not make another down in your yard, and put it up instead?" The Brigadier joined in the discussion. "We must have better observation in this sector if we possibly can."

"Cut this one down one night and put up a dummy in its place." The C.R.E once again considered the wretched stump. "Not a bad idea, General; the only question is who is to do it. It will have to be a good model, or the Huns will spot the difference; and . . ." Suddenly his face cleared. "By Jove! I've got it—Bendigo Jones. He's the man for the job."

"And who the deuce is Bendigo Jones?" asked the General, as the Sapper rapidly jotted down something in his note-book. "He sounds like a prize fighter or the inventor of a patent medicine."

"Bendigo Jones, General, is my latest acquisition. I have it on no less an authority than his own that he is a very remarkable man. I gather that he is futurist by inclination, and dyspeptic by nature, which I take to be a more or less natural sequence of events. At present he adorns my office, and looks intense."

"He sounds rather like a disease," murmured the Brigade Major. "From what you say, I gather he considers himself an artist."

"He sculpts, or whatever a sculptor does when he gets busy." The Colonel smiled gently. "How he ever blew out here I cannot imagine, but these things will occur. I offended him mortally, I regret to say, the first day he arrived, by confessing that I had never even heard his name, much less seen his work, but I think he's forgiven me. I allowed him to arrange the timber yard to-day more æsthetically, and the Sergeant-major thinks he is soft in the head, so Bendigo is supremely happy."

"He sounds a perfect treasure," remarked the Brigadier drily. "However, as long as he models that tree and we get it up somehow, and I never see him, I shall be quite happy, old boy."

"It shall be done," answered the C.R.E., "by our little Bendy himself. A life-size, hollow camouflage stump shall replace the original, complete with peep-hole and seat."

Thus lightly was settled the immediate future of one of the world's great ones. In view, however, of the fact that the world is so often lamentably ignorant of greatness, it now becomes necessary for me to carry out my second introduction and enlighten the Philistines as to what they have missed by their miserable and sordid materialism.

Be it known then that for several years Bendigo Jones had been in the habit of inflicting upon a long-suffering and inoffensive public a series of lumps of material. What these lumps were supposed to represent no one has yet discovered; and I am given to understand that unless the proud perpetrator noted it himself on completion, he too was usually unable to elucidate the mystery. It was not of great account, as he ran not the slightest risk of contradiction whatever he said; and as no person ever willingly went twice to his exhibitions, he could vary the title daily without fear of discovery. Another great point about his work was its many-sidedness. A lump looked at from one side would perhaps represent "Pelican with young," while on the other "The Children's Hour, or six o'clock at Mud View Villa,"

would be depicted. This, needless to say, economised greatly in space and matter; and in case any special exhibit failed to arrive in time, or was thrown away by mistake, an old one turned upside down at once remedied the defect.

His nearest approach to fame occurred during the period which followed the perpetration of his celebrated "Mother with her Child." It was announced that the gifted sculptor had worked on it for five years; and a certain amount of light was thrown on his methods by an interview he managed to get published in some obscure journal.

"Rising with a hoarse cry," ran this effusion, "Mr. Bendigo Jones hurled himself at his work. With a single blow he removed a protuberance, and then sank back exhausted.

"'You see the difference,' he cried, 'you see how I have altered her expression.'

"'Whose?' I murmured dazedly.

"'Why, the face of the woman. Ah! dolt, blockhead, have you no eyes—have you no soul?'

"'But you told me that was a church at sunset,' I remonstrated feebly.

"'What has that to do with it?' he shouted. 'It is what I like to make it, fool. What is a name? Nothing—a bagatelle. I have changed my mind every day for the last five years, and now my life's work is done—done.'

"Mr. Bendigo Jones sobbed quietly, and I stole away. It was not for me to gaze on such grief. And as I went through the open window I heard his final whisper.

" ' It shall be none of these things. I will pander to vile utilitarianism. It shall be—" A City Magnate at Lunch." ' "

It may be remembered that when it was finally put on view in London, enormous interest was aroused by an enterprising weekly paper offering prizes to the extent of a thousand pounds to any one who could guess what it was; and though Bendigo Jones's pocket was helped considerably by his percentage of the gate money, his pride suffered considerably when the answers were made public. They ranged from, " Model of the first steam engine when out of control," to " An explosion of a ship at sea," both of which happy efforts gained a bag of nuts. The answer adjudged most nearly correct was sent in by a Fulham butcher, who banked on " Angry gentleman quarrelling with his landlord on quarter-day " : which at any rate had the merit of making it human.

But I have digressed enough ; I will return to my sad story. How our friend ever did arrive in France is as much of a mystery to me as it was to the Colonel ; presumably a ruthless government, having decided it required men, roped him in along with the other lesser lights. The fiat went forth, and so did Bendigo —mildly protesting : to adorn in the fullness of time the office of the C.R.E. of whom I have spoken. And he was sitting there exhausted by his labours in helping the Sergeant-major rearrange the timber yard æsthetically, when a message arrived that the Colonel wished to speak to him.

" I understand, Jones, that you are a sculptor,"

remarked that officer genially, as our hero entered the office. "Now, can you model a tree?"

Bendigo gazed dreamily out of the window. "A tree," he murmured at length. "A little, beautiful tree. Green with the verdant loveliness of youth . . . green . . . green."

"It isn't," snapped the Colonel. "It's brown, and damned hideous, and full of splinters."

"Only to the eye of unbelief, sir." The sculptor regarded him compassionately. "To us—to those who can see things as they ought to be—more, as they spiritually are . . . it is different."

A door closed somewhat hastily, and the sounds from the next room seemed to indicate that the Adjutant's cough was again troubling him. The Colonel however remained calm.

"I have no doubt, Jones," he remarked dispassionately, "that what you have just said has some meaning. It is even remotely possible that you know what it means yourself. I don't; and I do not propose to try. I propose, on the other hand, to descend to the sordid details of what I wish you to do. You will commence without delay." He leaned back in his chair, and proceeded to fill his pipe.

"Up the line there is a tree stump standing on rising ground, which I wish you to copy. The model must be sufficiently good to deceive the Germans. It will be hollow, and of such a size as will accommodate an observer. The back will be hinged. When your model is made, the real tree stump will be

removed one night and the sham one substituted. Do you follow me?"

It is more than doubtful if he even heard. A slight attack of dyspepsia shook him as the Colonel finished speaking, and he passed his hands twice through his hair. "The thought—the future vista—is beautiful," he murmured. "And think; think of the advertisement. To-morrow, sir, I will gaze upon it, and fashion it in clay. Then I will return and commence the great work."

He faded slowly through the door; and after a long pause the Colonel spoke. "I wonder," he remarked thoughtfully to the Adjutant who had returned: "I wonder why such things are. . . ."

. . . . .

I am given to understand that the arrival of Bendigo Jones at the scene of his labours the next morning caused such a sensation amongst those privileged to witness the spectacle that the entire trench was blocked for two hours. To only a chosen band was vouchsafed the actual sight of the genius at work; the remainder had to be content with absorbing his remarks as they were passed down the expectant line. And it was doubtless unfortunate that the Divisional General should have chosen the particular moment when the divine fire of genius was at its brightest to visit the support line in company with his G.S.O.I and a galaxy of other bright and shining luminaries of the military world.

"What is the meaning of this extraordinary crush in the trench this morning?" he remarked irritably

to his Staff officer, as the procession was again held up by a knot of interested men.

"I really don't know, sir," murmured that worthy. "It's most unusual; it's . . ."

His words were drowned by howls of delighted laughter from round the traverse in front, and the next moment a perspiring soldier forced his way into the bay where the great ones were temporarily wedged. It was the special runner who was carrying the latest gem from the lips of Bendigo—at work a little farther up—to the expectant and breathless audience.

"Hay! little sandbag! Ho! little sandbag! 'Ow beautiful hart thou in textchah."

"Go on, Bill. Did the perisher say that?" An incredulous member of the group looked doubtful.

"Did 'e say it?" The carrier of news looked scornfully at the doubter. "Did 'e say it? Lumme! 'E said it twice, and then he buried 'is mug in its loverly fragrant surface, and pricked his nose on Ginger's bayonet. 'E's mad, boys; 'e's as mad as a plurry 'atter; 'e's got bats in 'is belfry."

Now, in spite of what I know of Bendigo Jones, I must admit that this reputed remark taxes even my credulity. Mad he undoubtedly was when viewed by the sordid standards of the vandals around him, but this inspiring ode to a sandbag grew somewhat, I cannot but help thinking, in the transmission. The regrettable thing was that it should have reached this stage when it was unwittingly presented to the Divisional General.

"Gangway!" he roared, as the hilarity remained

unabated: "gangway!" He elbowed his way through the suddenly silent throng and confronted the special runner. "Now, my man, tell me—what is all this tommy rot about?"

"Bloke farther up the trenches, sir, wot don't seem quite right in the 'ead." Somewhat confused at the sudden appearance of the powers that be, the perspiring harbinger of bons mots relapsed into an uncomfortable and depressing silence.

"Not right in the head," barked the General. "God bless my soul! It must be the heat. Dreadful. What shall we do, Curtis?" He appealed for support to his Staff officer.

"I think, sir, the Doctor might precede us," answered the other resourcefully, "and see if the man is dangerous. If so, no doubt he will arrange for his removal before he does any harm."

The A.D.M.S., or Assistant Director of Medical Services—the official title of the principal bolus booster in a Division—emerged with a sickly smile from behind a corner, and advanced unwillingly to the head of the procession.

"Excellent idea," remarked the General affably. "You can prescribe for him when you see the symptoms, old boy. Probably a most interesting case—provided he doesn't stab you on sight."

"Sit on his head, Doc., if he comes for you," remarked the Staff officer, gracefully handing over the position of leader, "and, above all, dear old thing, don't let him bite you. Give him a Number Nine to chew, and we'll bind him when he becomes unconscious."

"It's all jolly fine for you to laugh," said the Doctor peevishly. "I'm fat and you're thin, and you can hide behind me."

They reached the bay of the trench next to Bendigo, just as a further great utterance was starting on its way. In the excitement of the moment, caused by the General's sudden appearance, much of this gem was lost.

What was heard, however, did not diminish the Doctor's alarm.

"Howls in the leafy verdure," he remarked anxiously. "Good Heavens, General, he must be up the tree stump!"

"That's all right, sir!" remarked a sergeant reassuringly. "'E's quite 'armless. It's his spirit mind, 'e says. He thinks the tree is full of leaves."

"Yes—but who is howling in it," asked the General irritably. "I don't hear a sound."

"It's his spirit mind again, sir," answered the sergeant respectfully. "There ain't no one 'owling really; 'e means howls wot 'oot."

The procession paused awhile to digest this momentous fact, and the Staff officer seized the opportunity to again comfort the Doctor.

"Get him at once, old sport, before he becomes homicidal. You never know when the phase will change. He may fish in his tin hat with a bent pin first or he may shoot you on sight, but I'd go at once if I were you. You stand more chance."

Undoubtedly the sight which confronted them on rounding the traverse justified their worst fears.

The Doctor recoiled with a choking noise and endeavoured to wave the Staff officer forward.

"Not on your life, Doc.," remarked that worthy grimly—"not on your life. Go right in; and with your bulk you oughtn't to feel it much, wherever he kicks you."

Personally, I maintain the whole thing was rather hard on Bendigo. Before sending him up the line he should have been labelled; some warning as to his habits should have been noised abroad by the town crier. Then the unfortunate episode with the General would never have occurred. He would have made allowances, and withdrawn early for light refreshment.

But when a man whose face is of the type peculiar—the sort that you give the baby to play with—practises the habits of fourteen years unsuccessful dyspeptic futurism in a support line trench on a hot day, the result is likely to be full of incident. True—the wretched Bendigo knew no better; but no more did the General. And life is made of these trifling misunderstandings. . . .

The entranced spectators stiffened to attention as the procession of great ones—partially hidden behind the Doctor—advanced with due military precautions. Even the phlegmatic and weary Sapper who was assisting the genius, with base utilitarian details, such as the size of the trap door at the back of the proposed model, showed signs of animation. Not so Bendigo. With an expression on his face suggestive of great internal pain, he remained seated on the

fire-step muttering softly to himself and clasping to his bosom a large lump of what appeared to be mud.

Suddenly he placed it on the step beside him and rose with an air of determination. The staff performed two or three nimble steps of the foxtrot variety to the rear, and as they did so Bendigo sprang to the assault. With a sweeping half-arm blow he struck the mud and the mud retaliated. While it lasted the action was brisk, but the issue was never in doubt. After two minutes in fighting, Bendigo withdrew exhausted, and most of the mud went with him. What was left looked tired.

"A clear case of shell shock," muttered the Staff officer nervously in the Doctor's ear. "For Heaven's sake do something!"

"Yes, but what the deuce am I to do?" Perspiring freely the gallant officer advanced slowly in the direction of Bendigo, who suddenly perceived him.

The sculptor smiled wearily and pointed a languid hand at the result of his labours. "A great work, my friend," he murmured. "One of my most wonderful studies."

"Doubtless," remarked the Doctor cautiously. "Don't you think—er—you'd better lie down?"

"The leafy foliage; the wonderful green effect; the tree—as I see it. Fresh, fragrant, superb." Bendigo burbled on, heedless of his mundane surroundings.

"What is the fool talkin' about?" howled the

General, who was standing on tip toe trying to see what was happening.

"Hush, sir, I beg of you!" The Doctor looked round nervously. "A most peculiar——"

"I won't hush," roared his irascible senior. "Why should I hush? Some idiot is standing on my feet; and I'm wedged in here like a sardine. Let me speak to him." The General forced his way forward. "Now, you—my man, what the devil are you doing? And what's that damned lump of mud on the fire-step?"

"I am Bendigo Jones," returned the other dreamily. "Sculptah—artist—genius."

"I didn't ask who you were," barked the now infuriated General. "I asked you what that thing that looks like an inebriated blancmange is meant to be."

"That model?" Bendigo bent forward and gazed at it lovingly. "That is yonder tree as I see it. The base materialist with the foot rule will inform you of the mundane details."

The Sapper alluded to scowled heavily at the unconscious Bendigo. Somewhat uncertain as to what a base materialist might be, he felt dimly that it was a term to be resented.

"I was sent up 'ere, sir, with 'im to help 'im make a model of that there stump," he remarked morosely. "That's the fifteenth mess 'e's made this morning; and 'e's carried on 'orrible over the 'ole lot. If I might say so, sir, 'e don't seem quite right in his 'ead."

"I am inclined to agree with you," answered the General grimly. "He must be swept up and . . ."

Exactly what fate was in store for Bendigo will never be known. One of those visitations of fate which occur periodically in the trenches interrupted the General's words, and ended the situation in more ways than one.

"Look out, sir," cried a sergeant, with a sudden shout. "Rum jar coming."

It came: wobbling, turning, and twisting, the little black object descended from the skies towards them, and the crouching occupants of the trench heard it hit the ground a few yards away. Then it burst with a deafening roar: a roar which was followed by an ominous creaking.

It was the phlegmatic Sapper—the base materialist—who broke the news first.

With an expression of great relief on his face he gazed over the top of the trench. "Thank 'Eavens! you can't make a sixteenth, mate. The whole plurry tree's nah poo."

"Nah poo," murmured Bendigo Jones. "Nah poo. What is nah poo?" He stood up and peered over the top also. "I see no change. To some eyes it might seem that the tree had fallen; to mine it lives for ever—fragrant and cool." He descended and trod heavily on the General's toe. "To you, sir, as a man of understanding, I give my morning's labours. I have rechristened it. It symbolises 'Children at play in Epping Forest.'"

Magnificently he thrust the lump of disintegrating

dirt into the arms of his outraged superior. "It is yours, sir; I, Bendigo Jones, have given you my masterpiece."

Then he departed.

. . . . .

The only man who really suffered was the base materialist. Two hours later he rolled up for his dinner, in a mood even more uncommunicative than usual.

"'Ullo, Nobby," remarked the cook affably, "you don't seem yer usual chatty self this morning. An' wot '*ave* you got on your neck?"

"Less of it," returned the other morosely. "It's Hepping Forest. And that"—he plucked a fragment from his hair—"that is the bally twins playin' 'Unt the slipper.'"

Even the cook was stirred out of his usual air of superiority by this assertion, and contemplated the speaker with interest. "You don't say." He inspected the phenomenon more closely. "I thought as 'ow it was mud."

"It is." Nobby was even more morose. "It belonged to that 'orror Bendigo Jones, and 'e went and give it to the General." The speaker swallowed once or twice. "Then the General, 'e gives it back, in a manner of speaking. Only Bendy had gone by the time it come, and—I 'adn't. Lumme! wot a life."

VIII

THE SONG OF THE BAYONET

Two men were seated at a table in a restaurant. Dinner was over, and from all around them came the murmur of complacent and well-fed London. A string band of just sufficient strength gave forth a ragtime effort; a supreme being hovered near to ensure that the '65 brandy was all it should be. Of the men themselves little need be said: my story is not of them. Only their conversation, half serious, half joking, brought back the picture of Jimmy O'Shea—Irishman, cowpuncher, general scallywag, and his doctrines of war and the way of his death. As I sat at the next table lazily watching pictures in the haze of tobacco smoke, their words conjured up the vision of that incomparable fighter who paid the great price a year ago, and now lies somewhere near Le Rutoire in the plains beyond Loos. For their talk was of a strange thing: the bayonet and the psychology of killing. . . .

"Have you ever killed a man, Joe? that is, killed him with a bayonet?" It was the man in mufti who was speaking; and his companion—a Major in khaki—laughed shortly.

"I can't say that I have. I've shot one or two Huns, but I've never put a bayonet into one."

The other grunted. "They were teaching me to use a bayonet this morning. It's rather fun. An intensely pugilistic little man stamped his foot at me, and brandished a ball on the end of a stick in front of my face. One's aim and object, as far as I could tell from the book of the words, was to stab the ball with the point of one's bayonet, and at the same time grunt in a manner calculated to cause alarm and despondency to every one within earshot. At times you hit the ball with the butt of the rifle; at others you kick it, endeavouring if possible not to stub your toe. Everything depends on what part of the German's anatomy it is supposed to represent at the moment." He paused and relit his cigar; then he smiled slightly. "I rather enjoyed it. The pugilistic warrior was quite pleased with me. He barked 'stomach' at me out of my turn, and there was the dam ball about a yard away. I stabbed it, kicked it, hit it with my butt, and fell down, all in the course of two seconds. But you know, Joe,"—again he paused slightly—"it's one thing to joke and talk about it here. I can't help thinking it's going to be a very different matter when one gets to the real goods. Fancy putting a foot of cold steel into a man's body."

A woman paused by their table on the way out. "So you've actually joined up, you poor dear. Your wife told me you quite liked it."

"Yes, dear lady." He stood up and bowed. "After refusing me a commission for two years they've pushed me into what I believe they call the Feet. It's rather jolly. I haven't felt so well for years."

"And what do you do?" She adjusted her wrap to pass on.

"Oh! learn to stab people, and kick them in the tummy; and all sorts of little parlour tricks like that."

"You dreadful man! I don't believe you're a bit bloodthirsty really." She shook a reproving finger at him and laughed. "But I shan't mind a bit if you kill a lot of those nasty Germans."

She drifted away, and the man in mufti sat down again. "The last time I saw her she had a concert for the wounded at her house. A slightly bow-legged woman of great bulk was singing about her soldier lover, who saved her icckle bruvver. My hostess cried—she's that type. Only a little of course; but one tear somehow arrived."

The soldier laughed. "There are a few like that; thank heaven! not many. They've learned, Dick; they're learning every day."

"Up to a point. I am learning to stab people; a thing which, when you actually come down to it, is beyond her comprehension. She vaguely knows that that is a soldier's job—or one of them; but it means nothing to her. And I don't know that it means very much more to me."

"You'll find it will, my dear fellow, when the

moment comes, and you've got your rag out and are seeing red. Let's go."

The two men got up; waiters hastened forward; and in a few moments their table was empty. For a brief space the curtain of imagination had been lifted; the drama of grim stark death had flashed into a setting of luxury and life. . . .

And with the rise of the curtain Jimmy O'Shea had stepped on to the boards; for no man who knew him could ever hear the word bayonet without recalling him, if only for a second.

He was a mixture was Jimmy—one of those strange jumbles of character in which no country is more rich than Ireland. He would not take a commission, though times and again he was offered one by his Colonel.

"I can teach the boys more as a sergeant, sir," he would answer; "teach them better how to score the points that win."

"You bloodthirsty ruffian," laughed the Colonel. "Your old doctrine, I suppose, of close-quarter work."

"You have it, sir," answered O'Shea quietly. "Every dead German is one point up to us; every dead Englishman is a point down. I am teaching the boys how to kill, and not be killed themselves."

"But what the devil do you suppose they have been taught?" The C.O. would lean back and light a cigarette. "To sit and pick buttercups, and ask the Huns to shoot 'em?"

"Shooting, is it?" Jimmy's tone expressed immeasurable scorn. "The shooting will look after

itself. It's the bayonet I talk to them about, and where to put it, and how to use it. As you know yourself, sir, a man will shoot to kill, where he'll hesitate to use his bayonet—if he's new."

"That's so. It's instinctive at times."

"Bedad, sir, they have no instinct when I've finished with them—save one. Kill clean and kill fast; and God help you if you slip. . . ."

It is possible that when a person has given no thought to war, and the objects of war, this distinction may seem strange. Death is a big matter to the average being, and one of some finality; and the manner of one's going may strike him as of little account. In which assumption he is perfectly right—if he is the member of the party who is going to be killed. But that is not the idea which a man going into a scrap should hold for a moment. A man goes into a scrap to kill—not to be killed. To die for one's country may be glorious; to kill for one's country is very much more so, and a deuced sight less uncomfortable. Wherefore, as Jimmy O'Shea would have said, if you'd asked him, "It's outing the other swine you're after, me bucko; not being outed yourself. Once you've got your manicured lunch hooks (as a phrase for hands I liked that sentence) on the blighter's throat, it's up to you to kill him before he kills you. And don't forget it's no dress rehearsal show. You won't fail twice."

Now I do not wish to appear over-bloodthirsty, or to pretend for one moment that war is a gigantic and

continuous shambles. It is not. But the essence of war is man power, and the points are scored by putting men out of action, without being put out of action yourself. The idea may not be nice—but war is not nice: one may not approve of the sea being salt, but disapproval does not alter hard truth. And having once granted that fact—and surely none can deny it—it is the different methods of scoring points which must be discussed. Some are impersonal—some are not: some are done in cold blood—some in hot. The whole thing is just a question of human nature; and in war, above every other known thing in this world, it is human nature that tells: it is human nature that is the great deciding factor. A man throws a bomb into a saphead full of Huns. He lies there covered by the darkness, crouching, waiting—— One, two, three—and the sharp roar of the explosion shatters the peace of the night. Guttural cursings and a dreadful agonised moaning follow in the silence that seems the more intense through the contrast. And with a smile of great content wreathing his face, the bomber creeps stealthily away to avoid intrusive flares. The matter was impersonal, the groaning Hun was a Hun, not an individuality. . . .

A couple of men, mud-caked and weary, with a Lewis gun between them, are peering over the top in an early light of dawn. Beside them there are others: tense, with every nerve alert, looking fixedly into the grey shadows, wondering, a little jumpy.

"Wot is it, Bill?" A man at the bottom of the trench is fixing a rifle grenade in his rifle. "Shall I put this one over?"

"Gawd knows." Bill is craning his head from side to side, standing on the fire-step. "Lumme! there they are. Let 'em 'ave it, Joe. It's a ruddy working party." Drawing a steady hand he fires, only to eject his spent cartridge at once and fire again. With a sudden phlop the rifle grenade goes drunkenly up into the mist; with a grunt of joy the Lewis gun and its warrior discharge a magazine at the dim-seen figures. And later, with intense eagerness, the ground in front will be searched with periscopes for the discovering and counting of the bag. The matter is impersonal; the dead are Huns, not individuals....

But with a bayonet the matter is different. No longer is the man you fight an unknown impersonality. He stands before you, an individual whose face you can see, whose eyes you can read. He has taken unto himself the guise of a man; he has dropped the disguise of an automaton. In those eyes you may read the redness of fury or the greyness of terror; in either case it is you or him. And a soldier's job is to kill....

In nine cases out of ten he has forfeited the right to surrender, for as Jimmy used to say, "There's only one method of surrendering, and that's by long-distance running. When the blackguards come out of their trenches fifty yards away and walk towards you bleating, 'Yes, sare; coming at once, sare;

thick or clear, sare;' you may take 'em prisoners, boys."

Thus the doctrine in brief of Jimmy O'Shea, sergeant and cowpuncher, scallywag and sahib, devil and tender-hearted gentleman. I lifted my glass in a silent toast. The music was sobbing gently; the voices of women came stealing into my reverie; the smell of the brandy in my glass brought back a memory of other women, other brandy. . . .

The square in the old French town was alive with market carts, which lumbered noisily over the cobble stones, while around the pavements, stalls and barrows did a roaring trade. It was market-day, and the hot summer sun shone down on the busy crowds. Soldiers and civilians, women and small children bargained and laughed and squabbled over the prices of "oofs" and other delicacies for the inner man. Except for the khaki and the ever present ambulance which threaded its way through the creaking country carts, it might have been peace time again in Northern France. Yet eight or nine miles away were the trenches.

Facing the square was an open-air café, where a procession of large light beers was pursuing its way down various dry throats, belonging to officers both French and British: beer that was iced, and beautiful to behold. Away down a little farther on sat Jimmy O'Shea; not admitted into the sacred portals marked "Officers only," but none the less

happy for that. In front of him was a small glass of cognac. . . .

It was just as a stout and somewhat heated Frenchman in civilian clothes got up from the little table next to mine that it happened. There was no sound of warning—it just occurred. The house by the clock was there one moment; the next moment it was not. A roar filled the air, drowning the clattering carts; bricks, tables, beds went hurtling up into space; walls collapsed and crashed on to the cobbles. A great cloud of stifling dust rose swiftly and blotted out the scene. Then silence—the silence of stupefaction settled for a while on the watching hundreds, while bricks and stones rained down on them from the sky.

It was the little Frenchman who spoke first. "Mon Dieu! une bombe. Et moi je suis le Maire." He walked unsteadily towards the cloud of dust, and with his going pandemonium broke loose. Mechanically the beer went down our throats, while in all directions carts bumped and jolted, wheels got locked, barrows overturned. Still the same blue sky; still the same serene sun; but in the place of a quiet grey house—wreckage, dust, death. And around us the first frenzy of panic.

"Do you put that down to an aeroplane?" I looked up to see Jimmy O'Shea beside me. "All right, mother." He was patting an excited woman on her back. "I'll help you." He started to pick up the contents of her barrow, which reposed principally in the gutter, having been knocked off by a

bolting horse. "No need to get your wind up. You're cutting no ice in this show; you're only on as a super."

The woman somewhat naturally did not understand a word; but O'Shea had a way with women and children, wherein lay the charm of his strange mixture of character.

"Now these eggs, mother dear, these eggs. Bedad! they've gone to their last long rest. We can't even scramble them. Oofs, dear heart, oofs; napoo —finis."

"*C'est tout napoo.*" She even laughed as she looked at the concentrated essence of yellow and white flowing slowly down the gutter. "*Mon Dieu! voilà une autre.*" Another thunderous roar; another belching, choking cloud of dust and death, and a house on the other side of the square collapsed.

"It's no aeroplane, sir," said Jimmy, with his eyes on the sky. "It's a long-range gun, or I'm a Dutchman." He looked down to find a little girl clasping his knee and whimpering. "And phwat is it, me angel?" He caught her up in his arms and laughed. "Shure! and I've forgotten me little glass of stuff. Come along with me and find it."

He strode away, only to return with her in a second or two, laughing all over her face. Yes—he had a way with him, had Jimmy O'Shea.

But it was in the final tableau of that morning's work that I remember him best. It was a long-range gun as he said; and they put in fifteen twelve-inch shells in an hour, round about the square. Two got

the hospital, and one hit a barber's shop where an officer was being shaved. I remember we saw him with half his face lathered, and later on we found his hand still gripping the arm of the chair. As for the barber—God knows——

We sorted out the remnants of some children from the débris of one house; and I left O'Shea after a while with a little kid of eight or nine in his arms. She was booked for God's nursery, and the passing was not going to be easy, for she was hit—nastily. And it was while Jimmy was nursing the poor torn atom with the tenderness of a woman that another sergeant of his battalion came on the scene to see if he could help.

"God! Jimmy," I heard him say, "this makes one sick."

"Sick!" O'Shea's voice was quiet. "Sick! I've stuck many of them, thank the powers, but never again—never again, my bucko—will it be anywhere save in the stomach. Anything else is too quick."

I looked at his face; and I understood. . . .

Yes—I understood because I had seen: otherwise, I should not. He would have been talking another language—one to which I was a stranger: even as were those around me, in that London restaurant, strangers—even as the men, when they first come to France, are strangers. That is the point which is in danger at times of being overlooked, especially by those who remain behind. The men are not changed

in nature because they don a khaki coat, or even because they go into the trenches. They have gone to a new school, that is all; and if they would do well they must learn all the lessons—the many and very divergent lessons—they are taught. For in the hotch-potch of war there is a strange mixture of the material and the spiritual; and though at present I am concerned with the former, the latter is just as important. It is the material side of which the men such as Jimmy O'Shea are the teachers. Unless the pupils learn from the O'Sheas, they will have to do so from the Hun. And the process may not be pleasant. . . .

There are many branches of the main lesson: the counters in the game may be shells or bombs or rifle bullets or bayonets. But the method of scoring is the same in each case—one down or one up. And of them all the bayonet is the counter which is at once the most deadly and the most intolerant of mistakes. A good friend, a hard taskmaster is the bayonet, and O'Shea was the greatest of all its prophets. . . . The main object of his life was to imbue his men, and any one else he could persuade to listen, with its song. His practical teaching was sound, very sound; his verbal lashings were wonderful, unique. He'd talk and talk, and one's joy was to watch his audience. A sudden twitch, a snap of the jaw, and a bovine face would light up with unholy joy. The squad drawn up ready for practice, with the straw-filled sacks in front of them, would mutter ominously, and teeth would show in a snarl. Absurd, you say; not a bit; just a magnetic personality, and men of the right

stuff. Dash it! I've seen even the Quartermaster, whose ways do not lie near such matters, hopping about from one leg to the other when Jimmy's peroration rose to its height.

"Have you a child, MacNab, a little wee kid?" he would begin.

"I have, sargint," MacNab would answer.

"Then can you imagine that wee kid with his little hands cut off? Is it a boy, MacNab?"

"It is, sargint."

"It is. That's good. But they preferred doing it to boys, MacNab. Listen to me, the lot of you. Don't mind the aeroplane, Number Two in the rear rank. They're like gooseberries out here." Number Two's eyes would abruptly come to earth again and focus themselves on the man in front. "I want you to think," Jimmy would go on quietly, "of the dirty, lousy crowd of German waiters you remember at home in the days before the war. Do you remember their greasy-looking clothes, and their greasy-looking faces, and the way you used to treat 'em as the scum of the world? Would you have one of them, MacNab, cut the hands off your kid; would you, me bucko?"

"I would not, sargint." MacNab's slow brain was working; his eyes were beginning to glint.

"Then come out here." Jimmy's voice rose to a shout. "Come out and move. Do you see that sack? do you see that white disc? Run at it, you blighter; run, snarl, spit. That's the German who has killed your kid. The white paper is his heart;

run, man, run. Stab him, kill him; stuff your bayonet in him, and scream with rage."

The bewildered MacNab, on the conclusion of this tirade, would amble up to the sack, push his gun feebly in its direction, completely miss it—and look sheepishly into space.

"Mother of heaven! The first competitor in Nuts and May. Did you hear me tell you to hit the sack, MacNab? For God's sake, man, stick your bayonet in; hit it with your butt; kick it; tear it in pieces with your teeth; worry it; do anything—but don't stand there looking like a Scotchman on Sunday. The dam thing's laughing at you."

And so at last MacNab would begin. Bits of sacking would fly in all directions, streams of straw and sawdust would exude. He's kicked it twice, and hit it an appalling welt with the butt of his gun. The sweat pours from his face; but his eyes are gleaming, as he stops at last from sheer exhaustion.

"Splendid, MacNab; you're a credit to Glasgow, me boy. Are you beginning to feel what it's like to stick your point into something, even though it's only a sack?"

But MacNab is already more than half ashamed of his little outburst; he is unable to understand what made him see red—and somewhat uncomfortably he returns to his place in the squad. Only, if you look at Jimmy, you will see the glint of a smile in his eyes: the squad is new—the beginning has not been bad. He knows what made MacNab see red; by

the time he has finished with him, the pride of Glasgow will never see anything else. . . .

And yet what do they know of seeing red, these diners of London ? It is just as well, I grant, that they should know nothing; but sometimes one wonders, when they talk so glibly of the trenches, when they dismiss with a casual word the many months of hideous boredom, the few moments of blood-red passion of the overseas life, what would they think—how would they look—if they did know.

Would they look as did O'Neil's bride, when the robber chief's head arrived at the breakfast table ? Lest there be any unfortunates who know not Kipling let me quote :

> As a derelict ship drifts away with the tide
> The Captain went out on the Past from his Bride,
> Back, back, through the springs to the chill of the year,
> When he hunted the Boh from Maloon to Tsaleer.
> As the shape of a corpse dimmers up through deep water,
> In his eye lit the passionless passion of slaughter,
> And men who had fought with O'Neil for the life
> Had gazed on his face with less dread than his wife. . . .

Perhaps—who knows ? It is difficult to imagine the results of an impossibility—and knowledge in this case is an impossibility. Still at times the grim cynicism of the whole thing comes over one with a rush, and one—laughs. It is the only solution—laughter. Let us blot it out, all this strange performance in France : let us eat, drink and be merry. But some quotations are better not finished. . . .

" Come and join us at our table." A girl was speaking, an awfully dear girl, one to whom I had

been among the many "also rans." Her husband—an officer in the infantry—grinned affably from another table.

"In a moment," I answered her, "I will come, and you won't like me at all when I do." Then I remembered something. "Why do you dine with that scoundrel?"

"Who?—My funny old Dick? A dreadful sight, isn't he, but quite harmless."

"Is he? You ask him about the German at Les Bœufs whom he met unexpectedly, and see what he says."

The "Ballad of Boh da Thone" came back—the humour of it. Dick—the old blackguard—a rifle butt, and a German's head after he'd hit it—one side; a boiled shirt, dress clothes, and a general air of complacent peacefulness—the other. And the girl: it is always the girl who points the contrast. . . .

I laughed. "Go away, and talk to your harmless husband. I am wrapped in thought, or was, till you disturbed me."

What did she know—God bless her—of the details, the filthy, necessary details of war. To her it was just a parting from one man, who went into an unknown land where there was danger—hideous, intangible danger.

But of the reality. . . .

It is all contained in the one axiom—Kill, and kill at once, so as to have a maximum of time to kill more. And with the bayonet, do not let it be

imagined for a moment that the work is easy. Bayonet fighting requires perfect condition, a fair share of strength, and a quick eye. Mistakes, when a man comes to the real thing, are not likely to occur twice, and there are many things which a man must learn who aspires to become even as Jimmy O'Shea.

How to go round a traverse when a Boche is on the other side, and it's him or you; how to take on three men in succession, when the last one throws his arms round your neck, and burbles, "Ve vos friends—nein?" Jimmy was great on that point: with the bayonet jabbed upwards into the chin, and the sapient remark, "Ve *vos*, ma tear." But enough; this is not a treatise on bayonet fighting, and I have in mind to tell of O'Shea's last fight.

There is just one more scene which comes back vividly before I reach the end, and that is the final exercise he gave his men in their training. When they'd thrust and parried and stabbed; when they'd jumped trenches and thrust their bayonets into sacks on the other side; when they'd been confronted with strange balls of straw in unexpected places, and kicked them or jabbed them or bit them as the case might be—then came the gem, the *bonne bouche*.

These preliminary practices were only one stroke, one thrust; the last was a fight to the death in a manner of speaking, and it was generally preceded by one of Jimmy's better stories. The best he kept for recital just before going over the top; so as to send 'em along frothing at the mouth, as he put it.

"You don't remember Captain Trent, do you,

boys?" he'd begin. "Just stand easy a while, and I'll tell you about him. After that you've got to fight a bit. He was a great officer, boys, a grand officer—one of the best. Did you ever hear how he was killed? Come out here, Malvaney; we'll just start the scrapping while I tell you. Do you see this straw ball on the top of the stick? As long as it's off the ground, it's a German. Hit it, stick it, bite it, kick it, and go on till I put it on the ground again. And curse, you blighter, curse. Just think it's the German who stuck his bayonet into Captain Trent—one of *your* officers—while he was lying on the ground wounded in the head."

The ball began to dance. "Go on, Malvaney. Kill it, man, kill it; grunt, snarl; think of the swine and what they've done. Jab, jab—up in his throat. I'll get you a live one to practise on one day." At last the ball would come to rest, and Malvaney—his teeth bared, snarling—would face Jimmy, who stood there smiling grimly. And in a few seconds Malvaney would grin too, and the blood lust would die out of his eyes. . . .

"Good boy—not half bad!" O'Shea would nod approvingly. "The worst of it is the swine will never stand up to you—bayonet to bayonet. They prefer women and wounded men—like the Captain. Come here, MacNab, and get an appetite for your dinner. You can just rest a while—I'll get on a bit with that story. It was way back in the Spring, down south a bit; and we went over the top. Have you been over the top, MacNab?"

"I have that," answered the Scotchman in a reminiscent tone.

"How many did you kill?"

"Four-r—ah'm thinking; but ah'm no certain aboot one of them."

"Four! And none too dusty. Hit it, MacNab, me boy"—the ball would dance in his face—"hit it, as if 'twas the one of which you are not certain. Listen here, boys"—once again the ball was at rest on the ground—"I was behind Captain Trent when we went over—in the third wave; and when I got to the Germans I was just in time to see it." Jimmy's pauses were always dramatic.

"See wot, sargint?" An interested and comparatively new arrival to the battalion would lean forward.

"Captain Trent lying at the bottom of the trench—he'd gone over with the first wave—and a Hun pulling a bayonet out of him. Moreover, Captain Trent was wounded in the head." His voice gathered in fury. "Think of it, me bohunks; then think of a conscientious objector; and then come and kill this ruddy ball. A dirty filthy scut of a German waiter murdering a wounded Englishman. Hit it, MacNab; hit it; stab it, kick it; think you're scrambling for whisky in a prohibited area."

"Wot did you do, sargint?" The new arrival was still interested.

"What would you have done, Marmaduke? Come here, my boy; come here and breathe blood."

The new arrival—a little bashful at his sudden

notoriety—stepped forward. "I'd have killed him, sargint."

"Then kill this ball; go on—kill it. Damme, boy; you're jumping about like an old woman looking for a flea in a bed. Move, boy, move; the ball's the flea, and you're the old trout. Bite it, boy, bite it; stamp on it; take out your fork and stick it with that." The ball came to rest; the new arrival mopped his brow. "Did I ever tell you how to kill a man with your dinner fork, by sticking it into his neck? I will some day; it's a good death for a Hun."

"Did you catch that there swine, sergeant?" Another voice from the squad took up the tale.

"Did I catch him? Did I catch him? If I hadn't caught him, Percival, I wouldn't be here now. I wouldn't dare look an exempted indispensable in the face—let alone you. And for a fat man he ran well."

"Didn't 'e fight?" Marmaduke had more or less recovered his breath.

"Fight!" O'Shea grinned at the recollection. "He looked up; he saw me about five yards away; he gave one squawk like the female ducked-billed platypus calling to her young, and he faded round the traverse like the family do when the landlord comes for the rent. Come here, O'Sullivan—and break up the home."

Marmaduke retired, to be replaced by a brawny Irishman.

"I caught him, O'Sullivan—hit, man, hit—just as

he reached his dug-out. Kick it, man; you can't use your butt from there. Jab, jab—you blighter; for God's sake use your gun as if you loved it. He stuck in the door, O'Sullivan, for half a second. There's the ball—that's his back. Go on. Good, good." With an awful curse the Irishman lunged and the ball dropped to the ground.

"Dead," O'Shea grinned. "That's what I did: through the back. But the blamed thing stuck; I couldn't get it out. What do you do then, Marmaduke?"

"Put a round in, sargint, and blow it out."

"Good boy, Marmaduke. You'll be a Field-Marshal before you've done. That's what I did too; and I blew the swine down the entrance. Now then, half with sticks and half with rifles; go on—fight——"

This, as I said, was one of Jimmy's better stories. Incidentally it had the merit of being true. . . .

But one could continue indefinitely. Some one will write a book one day about Jimmy O'Shea, and the manner of his life. If so, order an advance copy; it will be the goods. Just at the moment it was the manner of his death that had me. I was back again in derelict Vermelles, with its spattered water tower, and the flat desolate plain in front. Loos is out of sight over the hill; only the great slag heap lies squat and menacing on one's left, with the remnants of Big Willie and Little Willie near to its base in the old blood-soaked Hohenzollern redoubt. Cambrin, Guinchy, La Bassée—silent and

haunted, teeming with ghosts, lie stagnant in the morning sun. The cobwebs drift across the Hulluch road, and in the distance, by the first bend, a man pushing a wheeled stretcher comes slowly walking back to the dressing station. It's still going on: nothing much has changed; and yet—the cigar is good; the brandy superb: the brandy Jimmy preferred. He only spent one leave in England; as a sergeant he couldn't get more; but I dined with him one night, dress clothes and all complete, and we drank that brandy. One need hardly say, perhaps, that the writing on the register of his birth would have been hard put to it to spell O'Shea. There have been many like him this war, from "the legions of the lost ones and the cohorts of the damned"; and they've come to us out of the waste places, out of the lands that lie beyond the mountains. Unhonoured, unknown, they've finished the game; and having finished, they lie at peace. Britain called them; they came—those so-called wasters; look to it, you overmuch righteous ones, who have had to be dragged by the hairs of your heads—bleating of home ties and consciences. . . .

I forget which of the stories I heard him telling the men that morning before they went over. He read one lot a thing he swore he'd got out of a German paper—Heaven knows if it was true. I remember it ended up: "Above all things show no mercy to the accursed English. They are the starters of this war; so spit on them, kick them, use them as the swine they are."

"There you are, boys," cried Jimmy cheerily, "listen to what the pretties say about you. You'll be into 'em in a minute; and don't forget what I've told you about the way to use your gun. Kill fast and kill clean. Don't you put up with any back lash from a sausage-eating waiter. Remember you're English, me boys; and remember the Regiment—the Regiment that's never yet failed."

And so he went on; worth a hundred times his weight in gold to men going in for the first time.

"Your point is at his throat, boy, don't forget it. You ain't playing the goat with a dam lump of straw now; you're going to get a bit of your own back with a real live Fritz. And if you make a mistake you may not have a chance of making another. Go there steady; don't get blown, or you'll find you won't be able to do what you'd like when you bump Master Boche."

He passed me with a salute and a wink.

"Coming over?" he asked me.

"I am, Jimmy, with some wire and other atrocities."

"Good," he said. "The boys are simply frothing blood."

He went on; and that was the last time I saw Jimmy O'Shea alive.

Ye Gods! My Lord ——, some day I'll tell you of your son's end. You kicked him out—perhaps rightly; though mercy was never your strong point. But if any of the belted ancestors in that gallery of

yours did as much for England as Jimmy did, or died as gloriously as Jimmy died, well, you should be a proud man, prouder even than you are. He sent the boys over raving mad with blood, and they struck Bavarians—and good Bavarians: men who could fight, and men who did fight. They were at it, teeth, feet, and steel for ten minutes: primitive, lustful fighting; and then the Bavarians broke; with the boys after them, stabbing and cursing. One or two were left, though they wouldn't surrender, more power to them. A Bavarian officer, in fact, concluded the eventful career of Sapper O'Toole, the company rum-swallowing champion. True he brained that officer with a coil of barbed wire on the end of a pick helve, even as the bullet entered his heart; but he was a great loss to us. And it was just as we surged over their bodies that we came to the tableau.

Jimmy lay round the traverse. We found him at the bottom when we'd sorted out the litter. There were six of them he'd done in in all; you could trace what had happened. They'd been lining the trench, and he'd taken them in order. It was in the fifth that his bayonet stuck. He couldn't get it out. It was still there. At that moment, evidently, Number Six had come at him, and he'd had no time. So they closed; and, my God! they'd fought.

I think they both must have gone out about the same time. Jimmy was shot through the heart by the Bavarian's revolver; the Bavarian's throat was cut with Jimmy's clasp knife.

No bad end, my lord; what say you? I will show you the exact spot some day, and your son's grave near by. I'd have his picture in the gallery if I were you. . . . I've got a snapshot I can let you have, taken in France. But I treasure it; and unless you hang it in the place of honour, amongst the Raeburns—I keep it. Mark you, he deserves that place of honour. . . .

. . . . .

"Captain Johnson's compliments, sir, and are you coming over to have a liqueur at his table?"

The waiter's voice cut in on my thoughts. The band was hitting a ragtime stunt; London had dined and was pleased with itself; Dick and his lady were beckoning. For the moment it felt like coming to from an anæsthetic.

I shook myself and got up. Of course I was drinking a liqueur with them: another glass of brandy—Jimmy O'Shea's brandy.

"Are you in love?" queried the girl anxiously as I sat down. "You've been muttering to yourself and squinting and Dickie got worried about you."

"Not more than usual—though I'm glad to learn the symptoms." Then I looked at her, and the wonder of a girl in love hit me almost like a blow. In it lay the answer to my thoughts. No longer a cynical amusement in their failure to realise the contrast, but rather a mighty thankfulness. For it is they, in their blessed ignorance, who keep us sane.

I raised my glass. "To things as they are, my lady," I murmured. And from the land of shadows Jimmy drank with me.

PART III

SEED TIME

I. THE SEED

II. THE FIRST LESSON

III. AN IMPERSONAL DEMONSTRATION

IV. SOMEWHAT MORE PERSONAL

V. A PROJECT AND SOME SIDE ISSUES

VI. THE SECOND LESSON, AND SOME FURTHER SIDE ISSUES

VII. THE THIRD LESSON, AND A DIGRESSION

VIII. THE THIRD LESSON IS LEARNED

IX. "AND OTHER FELL ON GOOD GROUND"

SEED TIME

I

THE SEED

I HAVE in my mind the tale of a superior young man—a very superior young man, genteel, and thoroughly versed in the intricacies of etiquette. The majority of the human race was, without any loss to itself, unaware that he existed; but the "ladies" and "gentlemen" on the staff of Mogg's Mammoth Emporium viewed him as the supreme arbiter of elegance. And just because the average human being would have asserted—and asserted correctly—that for such as him there is no hope save drowning in puppyhood, I would tell his story. It is the exception which proves the rule. It is the proof that we are the slaves of custom and environment; and that, given something as the bed-rock, much may be done by a good teacher. There *was* something in this very superior young man as it turned out, though few would have suspected it, had they seen him before the war. But then, no one can ever listen to a person

of the male sex proffering a good line of stockings in Lisle thread at one and eleven-three without experiencing a strong desire to be sick. Which goes back to what I said before: the whole thing is one of environment. The stocking vendors knew no better; for want of the necessary teaching they took to their nauseating trade. It's all in the Old Book—how shall they learn, unless they be taught? Had they had the teaching—well, listen to the story of this very superior young "gentleman," one time deputy chief stomach bender of Mogg's Mammoth Millinery Emporium—terms, Strictly Cash. What the sub deputy chief waistcoat creaser will say if he reads these words I shudder to think. You see, the very superior young "gentleman" was *so* genteel.

A hot morning sun shone down on the outskirts of the town. Nothing moved, nothing stirred; utter silence brooded over the houses that once had been buzzing with people—the people of Arras. Now their only occupants were rats. The little gardens at the back were dank with unchecked weeds, save where a great conical hole showed the clean brown earth. And at the bottom of each of these holes lay a pool of fœtid green water. The walls were crumbling, decay was rampant, the place breathed corruption. Occasionally the silence would be broken by a crash, and a little heap of brick rubble would subside into the road, raising a cloud of thick choking dust. Occasionally there would be another sound, like the drone of a great beetle, followed by a dull echoing

roar and a bigger cloud of dust. Occasionally would come the ping-phut of a stray bullet; but of human life there was no sign.

Not, that is to say, to the casual observer; but to the man who looked out of the aeroplane circling above much was visible which you or I would not see. To him there came the vision of an occasional move behind some mouldering wall: sometimes an upturned face, sometimes the glint of steel. In one garden by a broken cucumber frame a man was polishing his bayonet, and the flash from it caught the observer's eye. Just opposite—thirty yards away—two or three men were sitting round a fire from which the smoke curled slowly up. And the bayonet cleaner was clothed in khaki, while the cookers had on a dirty field grey; between them lay No Man's Land. But to the casual observer—silence: silence and death and the dreadful stink of corruption. Many others had cleaned bayonets and cooked stews under these same conditions, and many in the doing thereof had gone suddenly, and without warning, into the great Silence. For it was a sniper's paradise, as the victims—could they have spoken—would have testified. As it was they lay there lightly buried, and the same fool men made the same fool mistakes and came and joined them. As I say, it was a sniper's paradise. . . .

Into this abode of joy, then, came the very superior young "gentleman." It was principally owing to the fact that Miss Belsize—the "lady" who dispensed camisoles, or some equally seductive garments

—had flatly refused to accompany him any longer to the High Street Picture Palace if he remained in his frock coat, that our friend had donned khaki. For a long while he had stoutly affirmed that he was indispensable; then the transfer of affection on the part of camisoles to a dangerous-looking corporal from the wild and woolly West decided him. He did not like that corporal. No man who, meeting a comparative stranger, beat him on the back painfully, and, having looked his latest glad rags up and down, remarked with painful distinctness, "Lumme! is it real?" could possibly be considered a gentleman. But Miss Belsize had laughed long and laughed loud; and—well, I will not labour the point. In due course our superior one found himself in the haunt of death I have briefly described above, still full of self-importance and as inconceivably ignorant as the majority are who come for the first time to the game across the water.

Recently arrived with a draft it was his initial experience of war in France, in contrast with training in England; in fact, the morning in question was his first visit to the trenches. And because many better men than he have endeavoured to conceal a peculiar sinking of the stomach by an assumed bravado, let us not blame him for the attitude he endeavoured to take up.

"Pretty quiet, isn't it, corporal?" he remarked airily, as his section came to rest in a trench behind a mass of broken brick and cobble stones. "Lor', look at that glass up there, hidden in the stones."

For a moment curiosity mastered him, and he reached up towards it with his hand. The next instant he gave a cry of anger, as a jolt in his ribs with a rifle doubled him up. "What the deuce——" he began angrily.

"Don't you deuce me, my lad," said the corporal dispassionately, "or you and me will quarrel. Just you do what you're told, and I'll write and tell your ma you're a good little boy." The corporal—a man of few words—went on his way, leaving our hero—whose name by the way was Reginald Simpkins—fuming.

"If that blighter hits me again," he remarked when the N.C.O. was out of hearing, "I'll——"

"You'll what?" An old soldier looked at him scornfully. "He goes an' saves yer mouldy life and then yer bleats. Got yer bib, Reggie darling?"

"Not so much of your row." The corporal had come back again. "This ain't a ruddy colony of rooks in the nesting season. Now, Simpkins, you and Ginger—first relief. There's your periscope—you can relieve them other two."

"Where's the periscope?" asked Reginald of his companion in a whisper.

"The glass up there, you flat-faced perisher—hidden in the stones. Wot d'you think it is? A noyster laying eggs!"

The trench settled down to silence as the company relief was completed, and Reginald morosely nursed his grievance. Much of the gentle flattery to which he had been accustomed at Mogg's Mammoth

Emporium seemed conspicuous by its absence in this new sphere in which he found himself. Not to put too fine a point on it, people seemed positively rude at times, even ruder than they had been at home. He confided as much in an aggrieved whisper to the unsympathetic Ginger.

"Rude!" That worthy spat with violence and accuracy. "You wait till you bump into Shorty Bill. Rude! Gawd! 'E's a 'oly terror."

"Who is Shorty Bill?" queried Reggie, his eyes fixed on the glass whose mysteries he was beginning to understand.

But Ginger was in no mood for further confidences. "You'll find out fast enough 'oo Shorty is. 'E's down 'ere to-day. You watch that there periscope. This ain't no rest cure—this bit 'ere. It's 'ell."

"It seems pretty quiet," ventured the watcher after a short silence.

"Yus! That's wot the last man said wot I was with behind this wall. There's 'is brains on that stone behind you."

With an involuntary shudder Reginald looked round at the stone, on which the grim stains still remained. "What did it?" he asked, barely above a whisper.

"Black Fritz," answered the other. "'E's a sniper, what lives opposite; and 'e's paid for 'is keep that swine 'as—paid for 'is keep. Charlie Turner, an' 'Arry, an' Ginger Woodward, an' Nobby Clark, an' the sergeant-major, an' two orficers. Yus —'e's paid for 'is keep, 'e 'as—'as Master Black Fritz."

"And he's over there," said Reggie, a little breathlessly.

"Yus. Where the 'ell do you think 'e is? In an aeryplane?" Once again Ginger spat dispassionately, and then relapsed into a silence from which he refused to be drawn until the presence of two more men beside him indicated that the hour of relief had come.

"Now look here, Simpkins," said the corporal when the relief was completed, "this is your first visit to the trenches, isn't it? Well, you can sit down now and have a sleep, or you can write or read if you like. But, whatever you do, don't go showing your ugly face over the top; because this place ain't healthy." He turned away, and Reggie was left to his own resources.

"Come round the corner," said Ginger in his ear. "I'll show you a spot to sleep. I know this 'ere bit like me own back parlour."

And so—had any one been sufficiently interested in his doings to report the fact—it might have been noted that ten minutes later our friend was sitting on the fire step writing a lurid epistle to Miss Belsize, while Ginger lay peacefully asleep beside him, breaking the complete silence with his snores.

At last the letter was finished, and Reggie gave way to meditation. Everything was so utterly different to what he had anticipated that he could hardly believe he was actually in that mystic place the trenches. To his left a crumbling wall ran along until it bent out of sight, a wall which in most places

was three or four feet high, but which at one spot had been broken down until it was almost flush with the ground, and the bricks and rubble littered the weeds. In front of him lay the town, desolate, appalling, with a few rooks cawing discordantly round the windowless houses. And over everything brooded an oppressive hot stinking stillness that almost terrified him. . . .

After a while his gaze settled on the place where the wall was broken down, and his imagination began to play. If he went there—it was only about ten yards away—he would be able to look straight at the Germans. So obsessed did he become with this wonderful idea that he woke up the sleeping Ginger and confided it to him. There being a censor of public morals I will refrain from giving that worthy warrior's reply when he had digested this astounding piece of information; it is sufficient to say that it did not encourage further conversation, nor did it soothe our hero's nerves. He was getting jangled—jangled over nothing. It was probably because there was such a complete nothing happening that the jangling process occurred. A shell, a noise, anything; but not this awful, silent stagnation. He bent down mechanically and picked up half a brick; then just as mechanically he bowled the half-brick at the lump of débris behind the broken bit of the wall. And it was that simple action which changed our very superior young "gentleman" into a man: on such slender threads hang the destinies even of nations.

He watched the brick idly as it went through space; he watched it idly as it hit the ground just by a clump of dock leaves; and from that moment idly ceases to be the correct adverb. Five seconds later, with a pricking sensation in his scalp and a mouth oddly dry, he was muttering excitedly into the ear of the now infuriated Ginger.

"A man where, you ruddy perisher?" he grunted savagely. "Fust yer tells me if you goes and looks at the 'Uns you can see 'em; and then you says there's a man in the nettles. You ought to be locked up."

"There is, I tell you. I heaved a brick at that bunch of leaves, and it hit something that grunted." Reginald was still clutching his companion's arm.

"Un'and me, Clara," said the other peevishly, "this ain't a sixpenny 'op."

He got up—impressed in spite of himself by the other's manner—and peered at the mass of débris. "Wot d'yer want with 'eaving bricks for, anyway," he continued irately after a long inspection which revealed nothing. "This 'ere ain't a bean-feast where you gets the bag of nuts."

"Watch this time, Ginger." Once again a large fragment came down in the neighbourhood of the dock leaves—followed by an unmistakable groan.

"Lumme, mate," said Ginger hoarsely, "wot is it?" The two men stood peering at the rubbish, not ten yards away. "I'll go and get the corporal. You . . ." But he didn't finish his sentence.

Two shots rang out almost simultaneously. One

was from the German lines, and there was a short stifled scream from the other side of the traverse. The other was from the rubbish heap ten yards away, and the blast made a piece of hemlock rock violently. Otherwise the rubbish heap was lifeless—save for a sepulchral voice—"Got him." There was a crash of falling bricks from a house opposite—the sound of what seemed to be a body slithering down—and then silence.

Ginger's grip relaxed, and he grinned gently. "Gawd 'elp you, Reginald; you 'ave my blessing. You've been dropping the brickyard on Shorty Bill's back." He faded rapidly away, and our friend was left alone, gazing with fascinated eyes at the miraculous phenomenon which was occurring under his very nose. Suddenly and with incredible swiftness a portion of the rubbish heap, with dock leaves, nettles, old cans, and bricks adhering to it, detached itself from the main pile and hurled itself into the trench. With a peculiar sliding movement it advanced along the bottom, and then it stopped and stood upright. Speechless with amazement, Reginald found himself gazing into the eyes of a man which were glaring at him out of a small slit in the sacking which completely covered him. A pair of dirty earth-stained hands gently laid down a rifle on the fire-step—a rifle with a telescopic sight. Then from the apparition came a voice.

"Say, kid, are you the son of a ——, who has been practising putting the weight in my back? Don't speak, son, don't speak, or I might forget my

manners. Once in the ribs—and once in the small of the back. God above, my lad, if I'd missed Black Fritz, after lying up there for him for eight hours as part of the scenery, I'd have——"

"'Ullo, Shorty." The corporal rounded the traverse. "Fritz has got another. Poor old Bill Trent. Copped clean through the 'ead."

The corporal, followed by the strange uncouth being in sacking, with his leaves and bricks hanging about him, moved away, and Reginald followed. With his heart thumping within him he looked at the dreadful thing that ten minutes before had been a speaking, seeing, man; and as he looked something seemed to be born in his soul. With a sudden lightning flash of insight he saw himself in a frock coat behind the counter; then he looked at the silent object on the step, and his jaw set. He turned to Shorty Bill.

"I'm dam sorry about that brick; but I'm new to the game, and I had no idea you were there. Didn't you say you'd got Black Fritz?"

"'Ave you, Shorty—'ave you got the swine?" An eager chorus assailed him, but the man in the sack had his eyes fixed on the very superior young "gentleman." At length he turned to the men around.

"Yep—I got him. Half left—by the base of that red house. He came out of the top window. You can see a black thing there through a periscope." The men thronged to have a look, and Shorty Bill turned to the stone thrower.

"Can you shoot?"

"A little; not much I'm afraid."

"Like to learn the game? Yep?—Right. I'll teach you. It's great." He moved slowly away and turned up a communication trench, while into the eyes of Mogg's pride there came a peculiar look quite foreign to his general disposition. A game—a great game! He looked again at the poor still thing on the step, and his teeth clenched. Thus began his fall from gentility! . . .

II

THE FIRST LESSON

It was not a very rapid descent. The art of sniping and its attendant pastime scouting is not learned in a day. Moreover, in company with the other games that are played in the trenches, it has the one dominant feature about it. One mistake made in the rules is one too many; there is no chance of making a second. True, the player will have taught the man who takes his place yet another of the things not to do; but personally—even at the risk of being dubbed a pessimist—the method o teaching is one I would prefer to see others employ, sentiments which were shared to the full by Shorty Bill. Therefore our superior young friend, having

gazed upon the result of a sniper's bullet, and in the gazing remoulded his frock-coated existence, could not have come under a better master.

Shorty Bill was a bit of a character. Poacher and trapper, with an eye like a lynx and a fore-arm like a bullock's leg, he was undoubtedly a tough proposition. What should have made him take a liking to Reginald is one of those things which passes understanding, for two more totally dissimilar characters can hardly be imagined. Our friend—at the time of the shooting of Black Fritz—was essentially of that type of town-bred youth who sneers at authority behind its back and cringes to its face. Such a description may sound worse than the type deserves; for all that, it is a true one of the street-bred crowd—they've been reared on the doctrine. Shorty was exactly the reverse. Shorty, on one occasion, having blocked six miles of traffic with a fractious mule, and being confronted suddenly by an infuriated Staff officer who howled at him, smiled genially and electrified the onlookers by remarking pleasantly, "Dry up, little man; this is *my* show." That was Shorty in front of authority. Behind its back—well, his methods may not have commended themselves to purists in etiquette, but I have known officers sigh with relief when they have found out unofficially that Shorty had taken some little job or other into his own personal care. There are many little matters—which need not be gone into, and which are bound to crop up when a thousand men are trying to live as a happy family—where the unofficial ministrations of

our Shorty Bills—and they are a glorious if somewhat unholy company—are worth the regimental sergeant-major, the officers, and all the N.C.O.'s put together. But—I digress ; sufficient has been said to show that the two characters were hardly what one would have expected to form an alliance.

The gentle art of sniping in the battalion when Bill joined with a draft had been woefully neglected. In fact, it was practically non-existent. It is not necessary to give any account of how Bill got the ear of his platoon commander, how he interested him in the possibilities of sniping in trench warfare, or any other kind of warfare for that matter, and how ultimately his platoon officer became mad keen, and with the consent of his C.O. was made Battalion sniping officer. Though interesting possibly to students of the gun and other subjects intimately connected with sniping, I have not the time to describe the growth of the battalion scouts from a name only to the period when they became a holy terror to the Hun. I am chiefly concerned with the development of our frock-coated friend into a night prowler in holes full of death and corruption, and one or two sage aphorisms from the lips of Shorty Bill which helped that development. They were nothing new or original, those remarks of his teacher, and yet they brought home to him for the first time in his life the enormous gulf which separated him from the men who live with nature.

" Say, kid, do you ever read poetry? " remarked Bill to him one night soon after the episode of the

brick-bats as they sat in an estaminet. "I guess your average love tosh leaves me like a one-eyed codfish; but there's a bit I've got in me head writ by some joker who knows me and the likes o' me.

"'There's a whisper on the night wind, there's a star agleam to guide us,
And the wild is calling, calling . . . let us go.'"

Shorty contemplatively finished his beer. "'The wild is calling.' Ever felt that call, kid?"

"Can't say I have, Shorty." His tone was humble; gone was the pathetic arrogance that had been the pride of Mogg's; in its place the beginnings of the realisation of his utter futility had come, coupled with a profound hero worship for the man who had condescended to notice him. "When are you going to teach me that sniping game?"

The real sniping commander of the battalion—I mean no disrespect to the worthy young officer who officially filled that position—looked at the eager face opposite him and laughed.

"You'd better quit it, son. Why, to start with, you're frightened of the dark."

"I'm damned if I am." The aggrieved Percy waxed indignant.

"Oh, cut it out! I don't mean you're frightened of going to bed in the dark, or that you want a night-light or a nurse. But yours is a town dark: standing under lamps gettin' the glad from a passing skirt. But in the real dark, when it's pressing round you like a blanket, and there are things moving, and people breathing near by, and you don't know whether

it's a German or a pal, or where the wire is, or which way your own trenches are—what then, son, what then ? Why, I reckon you don't even know which the Pole Star is, or what it's there for ? "

"I guess not, Shorty," remarked the other, abashed; "but I'd soon learn, if you'd teach me."

"Well, I'll see. An' there's that blamed old woman with a face like a wet street tryin' to shut up the shop. Give me another, mother darling; no good your na-poohing me—I'm going to have it if I takes it."

Being what he was he got it, and that evening the lessons began. Going back to their billet, they had to cross a field. It was a pitch-black night, and before they had proceeded twenty yards Reggie could hardly see his hand in front of his face.

"Dark, Shorty, ain't it ? " he remarked.

There was no answer, and he stopped and repeated the question. Still no answer, though he seemed to feel some one close by. Something brushed his face, and then silence. With a short laugh he walked on—a laugh which had just the faintest touch of bravado in it. Four times in the distance to the billet did that something brush his face again, and though each time he felt that there was some one near him, yet he heard nothing. The fourth time he stopped and spoke.

"Is that you, Shorty ? " The next instant he gave a jump of pure nervous fright. From within six inches of his ear came the single word "Yep."

"Jove! You did give me a start." He laughed a little shakily. "Where have you been?"

"Circling round you, son, dusting your face with my glove. Understand now what I meant by helpless in the dark?"

Thus ended the first lesson. . . .

The others followed in due course. The correct way to crawl through grass so as to avoid being mistaken for a rhinoceros going to water; the power of observation so as to be able to spot a change in the German trenches—maybe, only a few sand bags moved, but just enough to place the position of a machine gun; the value of disguise to defeat the curious on the other side; patience, the way to fire a rifle, the use of his eyes. All these and certain other things was he taught.

And the certain other things were mysterious and secret. They occurred at odd times and in odd places, and the instructor was always Shorty Bill personally.

"Some men," he would say, "like killing with a rifle; I do for one. Some like killing with a revolver; not bad either, and essential, son, when you're out on the tiles by night and can't carry a rifle. A rifle is a dam nuisance at night if one's on patrol, whatever any one says to the contrary. An' if you don't carry a gun you can't use a bayonet, which is a beautiful method of sticking 'em." Shorty thoughtfully removed his pipe. "I was almost converted to the bayonet one day by a pal of mine. He's dead now, poor devil, but he lived well. He was givin' tongue

over the beauties of picking Huns out of dug-out entrances with the bayonet like winkles out of their shells with a pin. Gosh! it was great—that boy's palaver. He almost converted me, an' then I showed him a couple o' little stunts of mine." Shorty put his pipe in his pocket. "Come here, son, an' pay attention. It was through forgetting in the excitement of the moment and not payin' attention that my pal the winkle plucker went west."

Thus the mysterious lesson would start. "There'll come a time one night, boy, when you're out in the dark, an' you're crawling near the wire, when you'll feel on a sudden there's some one near you. Maybe, by the smell of him, you'll know it's a Boche. Well —then it's up to you to make good. You can plug him with your hand gun when you've got his dirty face dead set; but if you start shooting practice in No Man's Land, the audience join in. So I'll just show you a couple o' little tricks—silent tricks, which you can use when you get your hands on him. They kill just as clean if not cleaner than a gun, and no one's the wiser. Now come at me as if you meant to hurt me. No; not as if you were out pushing the baby in the pram, but just as if you was goin' all out to kill me. That's better, son; an' where are you now?"

To be correct our one and only Reginald was lying on his face with the unpleasant knowledge in his brain that if he moved an inch his left arm would snap at the elbow; and that kneeling above him Shorty held, in the neighbourhood of his ear, a villainous

weapon of his own invention, which resembled a cross between a bill-hook and a kukri.

"You see the idea, boy, don't you? Now, you ask him if he'd like to surrender, and if you don't understand what he says or he seems doubtful like, put your clasp knife in there." Reginald felt a prick under his right ear. "Right in—you take me. Get up, and we'll do it again."

"Where did you learn that, Shorty?" asked our pupil as he got up.

"A Jap taught me that an' a good few more in Los Angeles. Jujitsu, he said it was; dam good sense I call it. Come on—it takes practice."

And Reginald Simpkins practised. With growing confidence he practised day in, day out. Mogg's had faded into the limbo of forgotten things; his horizon consisted of a fœtid shell hole, a panting, writhing Hun fighting for his life in the darkness of the night, a cracking arm and then . . . His imagination never took him beyond that point. Sufficient of the old Adam of gentility still remained to prevent him picturing the final tableau. You see, Reginald Simpkins had not as yet killed anything larger than a rat, and even then he had bungled. . . .

III

AN IMPERSONAL DEMONSTRATION

As was proper and fitting his first head was gained cold-bloodedly and from a distance. It was his blooding into the ranks of the snipers. His probationary period was over; Shorty Bill had professed himself satisfied. The battalion had moved from the place in which we found them, and had gone farther north. The country was flat and desolate; periodically the ground would shake and tremble, and in No Man's Land chalk and rubble and the salmon-pink fumes of ammonal would shoot upwards, showing that the men of the underworld still carried on. Slag-heaps, sandbags, and desolate mounds of earth formed the scenery for his debut, while the orchestra consisted of rum jars and rifle grenades.

D Company it was who had lost a sergeant through a German sniper; and the fact was duly reported. Now when a German sniper takes the life of a man in a battalion which goes in for the art itself, it is an unwritten law that from that moment a blood feud exists between the German and English snipers opposite. Though it takes a fortnight to carry out, yet death is the only finish.

Wherefore, one morning, just as the first pale glints of dawn came stealing over the silent land, Reginald Simpkins climbed carefully into a great mound of

sandbags which had conveniently been deposited just behind the front line by the miners. But it is doubtful if Miss Belsize of the camisole department would have recognised him. No longer the frock coat and pearl tie, no longer the patent-leather boots and immaculate trousers. In their place a dirty-faced man in khaki, tastefully draped in flapping sandbags—his boots covered, his hands stained. Very cautiously he made himself comfortable; with immense care he laid his rifle—also covered with sacking—in the direction he required; and then he covered his front and sides with filled bags. Through a hole—also carefully arranged—his screened telescope covered the bit of German trench where the day before the German sniper had lain. Then he waited.

The mists cleared away; the morning sun shone down. From his point of vantage—for he was seven or eight feet above the trenches below—he watched the German lines. His fingers itched to pull the trigger two or three times; and once when he saw a German officer come out of his dug-out in the second line and lean against the back of the trench, smoking a fat cigar, he almost yielded to the temptation. But the splintering of a periscope glass below him, as a German bullet hit it, told him that the sniper was there—hidden somewhere, and watching too; and he knew that, perfect though his position was for *one* shot, that one shot would probably give him away. And that *one* shot was for the sniper, and not to be wasted on a fat Ober Lieutenant. . . .

Three or four hours passed, and the silence was complete. The perspiration trickled down his neck as he lay there motionless and clouded the eyepiece of his telescope. Then suddenly he saw a little black object shoot up into the air from the junction of two trenches near the German support line—an object which turned over and over in the air, and fell with a soft thud fifty yards to his right. A roar —and some sandbags and lumps of chalk flew in all directions, while fragments pattered down on Reginald out of the sky.

"Hope to God they don't come any closer," he muttered, watching the next rum jar shoot up. "Anyway, I've marked the place they're coming from." Then his eyes came back to the sniper's locality, and as they did so a quiver of excitement ran through him. Utterly regardless of the second rum jar which burst with a crack behind him, he knew for the first time the feeling of the big game man who has stalked his quarry successfully. There, five yards to the left of where he had been looking, a little stunted bush was moving—*and there was no wind.* Trembling with excitement he focussed his telescope on the bush, and even as he did so, he knew his vigil was over. The thing which up to that moment he had taken for a log was a man—*the* man, the sniper. He could see the faint outline of his face, now that his attention was drawn to it, and with infinite care he drew a bead on the centre of it. Then suddenly he started shaking with nervous keenness ; his left hand wobbled like a jelly through sheer excitement until he almost

sobbed with rage. The German moved again as another rum jar burst, confident that the English would have gone to ground to escape the trench mortaring. It was that arrogant movement that infuriated our friend. It struck him as a deliberate challenge. And for just a moment the German's face and the crossed hairs of his telescopic sight coincided, and coincided steadily.

It seemed to Reginald that his pressing the trigger and the wild convulsive lurch of the man opposite were simultaneous. With his eye to the telescope he watched the log that writhed and squirmed; then it grew still, and the disguise had gone. No more a log: just a motionless twisted form; while something that showed dark and ominous through the telescope spread round its head. The sergeant of D Company was avenged. . . .

With a feeling rather as if he personally had won the war, our hero slipped backwards into the boyau beside him, and went in search of Shorty Bill. Two hours later he found him and poured out the story. Shorty listened in silence; then he spoke.

"I've heard men talk like you, son, when they've kissed their first woman. Have you reported where that trench mortar is?"

"God! Shorty, I clean forgot. I'll go and do it now," remarked Reggie, his ardour somewhat damped.

"I should dam well think you'd better." Shorty relit his pipe, and grinned amiably. "Well done, kid; but for Holy Mike's sake don't crow over one

plurry Boche. When you've touched three figures we'll celebrate. . . ."

He may have been right; but even on his own showing, is there any kiss which is quite like the first? Is there any Hun, who——? Still, possibly the analogy is unfortunate. Anyway, I have given the account of his first cold-blooded victim; I will follow with his first hot-blooded one.

IV

SOMEWHAT MORE PERSONAL

It occurred about six weeks later in the same part of the line; and as a mark of special favour he had been allowed to accompany Shorty on one of his nightly prowls. That worthy was wont to remark that two men on a joy ride in No Man's Land was one too many; wherefore it must be assumed that Reginald had grown in wisdom and cunning, and found favour in the sight of his taskmaster.

They slipped over the top about ten p.m. Shorty was armed as usual merely with the villainous bill-hook-kukri of his own design, while Reggie carried a revolver and a clasp knife which resembled a young bayonet. It was not a reconnoitring patrol as laid down in the book of the words; it was merely a

pleasure ramble, so Shorty said, as they passed silently out of a sap and disappeared in the darkness.

The first thing Reggie did was to kick a tin and fall into a shell hole, where he was joined by Shorty.

"Frightening rooks, son," he remarked kindly, "or rehearsing as a knockabout comedian? About twenty-five yards from here on our left is the German sap party that I am visiting to-night. I like 'em to know I'm coming."

"Sorry, Shorty," muttered the delinquent. "I never saw the ruddy thing."

"You don't say. I thought you'd a-done it on purpose," returned the other with ponderous sarcasm. "Now you stop here; I'm goin' to that sap—an' I'll come back for you."

Like a wraith Shorty faded into the night, leaving our friend alone with his thoughts. A Lewis gun was firing away down the line in short bursts, while Verey lights and flares went up every now and then with a faint hiss. Above, the low-flying clouds scudded over the sky, and our friend lay back in his shell hole and pondered. With an inward chuckle he wondered what the beautiful Miss Belsize and the other fair ones of Mogg's would say if they could see him at that moment. A sense of physical well-being was on him, and he stretched himself luxuriously. The next instant he was struggling impotently in a grip that throttled him.

"Quite so," remarked a voice as the grip relaxed, and by the light of a flare he found Shorty occupying

the shell hole once again. "A ruddy lot o' good you are. Killed and dead as mutton by now, if I'd been a Boche."

Reggie reddened in the darkness with shame. "I wasn't thinking, Shorty. I—er . . ." His words died away.

"Thinking! You flat-footed clam — this show ain't a debating society, nor yet a penny reading." Shorty snorted with rage. "Go over to that saphead there—d'you see it—an' see what thinking does." His hand pointed to a low hummock of chalk behind a crater. "Go an' look in, I tell you; an' if ever you sit out here again dreaming like a love-sick poet, I hope to God it happens to you. You'll deserve it."

With a push like the kick of an elephant's hind leg he propelled the wretched Reggie in the required direction. Puzzled and surprised, but feeling very ashamed of himself, he moved cautiously towards the low mound that stood up dimly outlined against the night sky. Once on the short journey he crouched motionless while a flare burnt itself out twenty yards away, only to move forward immediately the darkness settled again with quickened step. There is no time so good to movement as the few seconds after the eyes of possible watchers have been dazzled. . . .

And so he came to the saphead, and cautiously peered in. Under ordinary circumstances his action was that of a fool; but Shorty had ordered, and those who knew Shorty got in the habit of carrying out his

instructions. For a while in the blackness he could see nothing He noted the sap running back towards the German lines; but at the head of it there was no sign of life. He carefully stretched farther over, and as he looked at the bottom of the trench he made out a dark, huddled figure. Then the next flare went up, and Reginald Simpkins got the shock of his life.

The green ghostly light came flooding in, and then went out as abruptly as it had come. But the moment was enough. Clear stamped on his brain, like a photographic exposure, was the image of two men. One lay at the bottom of the trench and grinned at the sky with his throat cut from ear to ear; the other —huddled in a corner with his hand still clutching a bomb—was even as he looked turning on his head and his knees, only to subside with a squelch in the mud, kick spasmodically, and lie still.

"Right in—you take me ?—with your clasp knife." Shorty's words came back to him and he gasped. So this was what his teacher had meant, when he'd sent him to see the dangers of thinking.

It was just as he was visualising the scene: the sudden ghostly appearance of Shorty on top of the unsuspecting Germans; the sudden stroke of that awful weapon; the feeble attempt to get the bomb; the——well, it was just then that Reggie found himself contemplating from about six inches range the glaring face of a Prussian N.C.O. who had suddenly materialised. By the light of a flare down the line he watched, as he lay on top of the ground,

with his head over the edge of the sap, the ring of the Prussian's revolver as it moved up towards his face.

What happened, happened quickly: most of these things are touch and go. The bullet whizzed past his face into the night—his left hand hit the revolver just in time; and even as the bullet went wide his right hand struck sideways with the knife. It sank into the Prussian's neck; he felt a rush of something warm and sticky, and then he was grabbed from behind.

"Quick," muttered Shorty in his ear, "hop it; hop it like hell. I'll guide you."

Blinded and dazed by the blast of the revolver, he stumbled mechanically after his leader. "Into this shell hole for a moment," whispered Bill imperatively, as a machine gun let drive with a few rounds which passed over them like a flight of cockchafers. "Now come on. Home this trip, my boy—I didn't know that swab was there. . . ."

"I killed him, Bill," said Reginald, half an hour later, as he sat rubbing his eyes on the fire step of their own trenches to get the stinging of the cordite out.

"You done well, son," said Bill; "an' if any one doubts it—show 'em your hand."

By the light of a match Reggie looked at it, and he shuddered. It bore, as Bill implied, the proof of death.

He was silent too awhile; the first hot-blooded one is more rattling to the nerves than a stranger three

hundred yards away. Then a great thought struck him, and he cursed.

"I've left my knife in his neck, Bill. What a blasted idiot!"

V

A PROJECT AND SOME SIDE-ISSUES

It is quite possible that there are some who, having read thus far, will consider that the education of Reginald Simpkins as a soldier was now complete. Transformed from a dreadful being who cut up silks and things and discoursed on the merits of what I understand is known as lingerie, he had become a man: a man with a quick hand and a sure eye, a man who had met one of his kind in fair fight and killed him. In his mind there had been born pride—the right sort of pride. Not the spurious article which had passed for it at Mogg's—that unpleasant type of conceit of which pimples and a high collar are the outward and visible sign. No, not that at all. He had cast that off with his frock coat, and in its place had grown the inherent pride which is the birthright of a *man*.

It was just because the metamorphosis had been so complete, and the growth had been so rapid, that

his education was by no means finished. It had only just begun.

So far I have dealt principally with one phase in the gentle game of war : the phase that concerns itself with outing the wily Hun by means of a rifle bullet. True, Reginald had tasted of other pleasant methods under the kindly guidance of Shorty Bill ; he had even gone so far as to enter into wordy warfare with the battalion exponent of bayonet fighting with regard to the relative merits of the bayonet G.S. and the weapon that he had presented to the Huns on his night prowl. In fact, our friend was beginning to hold opinions—and quite decided opinions—of his own. He was still in his infancy, I admit ; but to those who were privileged to watch his growth he seemed a hopeful specimen. The seed appeared to be falling on good soil.

But it may be remembered that with regard to the question of the sower, the seed which fell on stony ground appeared good for a time, until it was found that there was nothing behind it. Precocity is a dangerous thing, and in his new school Reginald was certainly precocious. Nowadays it is necessary to form judgments quickly in the Army : the game is being played at such high pressure. And so mistakes are bound to occur, though the Honourable James Lascelles disliked making them now, just as much as he did in the days when he could take his time.

The thing in question at the moment was the fitness of our friend for the stripe when a vacancy occurred ;

and the Honourable Jimmy, being the Adjutant of the South Devons, and having the headquarter specialists under his eye, was somewhat intimately concerned with the solution of the question. I think I have failed to mention previously that it was the South Devons that Reginald adorned—that celebrated regiment known to the Army and the world at large by the more familiar soubriquet of the "Stick 'em and be damned."

So when the edict of Toby Seymour, the C.O., went forth, the Adjutant seized the opportunity of trying to find out a little more fully whether it really was good soil in Reginald's case, or whether it was stony To-day the edict would seem almost a matter of routine; at that time things were different. Toby ordered a raid, and it was so.

It was to be a raid on a large scale: no isolated affair like the pilgrimages of Shorty Bill, but an affair where the enemy's trenches were to be entered by a large party. No silent, stealthy work, but a thorough good jolly, with bombs and noises complete.

To-day raids are stale, and things of but little account. Sometimes the bag is large, and sometimes the bag is small; but the performance occurs twice nightly, with frequently a matinée thrown in. Then they were something new, and enterprises to be talked about.

The project first took concrete form in the back room of a certain estaminet which served as the Headquarters mess when the battalion was resting

after a spell in the trenches. The omelette had been successful, the port had recently arrived, and that pleasing, though somewhat selfish, glow which comes even to the best of us when we realise that it is the other fellow who is out in the cold wet night permeated the room.

"Sarah Jane," remarked Toby to his second-in-command, as he thoughtfully sipped his port, "I have been thinking."

"Have you, dear old soul? That's very jolly."

"I have been thinking," went on the C.O., "that the boys require waking up. There is a danger of their degenerating into trench machines. They want ginger."

The second-in-command looked at his Colonel keenly. "I agree with you," he returned after a short silence. "But it's rather hard to give 'em anything to ginger with in the middle of winter and in this locality. The division will probably be pulling out to train shortly, and then——"

"No—that won't do," Toby interrupted him. "I don't mean that sort of ginger. How many men of this battalion feel instinctively, and know as a positive fact, that—man for man—they are better than the Huns? That's the point, and training behind won't help that; at least, it won't start it. Once give it to them as a foundation, and the training will gain five hundred per cent. in its value."

"True, O king, but how?"

"They must fight the Germans, and find out for themselves. We've got some new drafts, Sarah—

quite a number of new drafts who not only have never fought the Hun, but who have never even seen him. Their horizon is bounded by a dirty sandbag and a smell; and I maintain that their value as fighting troops is not one quarter what it might be."

He carefully lit his pipe while the rest of the mess watched him curiously—wondering what was in his mind.

"Listen to me, you fellows." Toby leant forward in his chair and emphasised his remarks with his ancient and powerful briar. "Every one in this room is—for want of a better word—blooded. We have all, thank Heavens! had the unforgettable pleasure of killing Huns at close quarters, with our own hands. Now that broadens one's horizon at once. We are not bounded by sandbags and stinks; when we are in the trenches, we know—our imagination tells us—that over the way are men whom we can visualise: living, actual beings whose ideal and object in life is to kill us. Not so, I regret to say, with a new draft: how can you expect it? To them the Hun is a strange something living in a trench, whom they never see, and whom they don't particularly want to. One might almost say that 'live and let live' is bound to be the way they look at life at present. Until the terrier sees the rat he has no wish to kill it; and until he has killed it he has no idea what a delightful occupation it is. Same with the men; and we've got to alter it."

"Bravely spoken, sir, as the poets would say,"

remarked the Honourable James. "The only point is how to do it."

"Easy as falling off a log. One night we will pay the Huns a visit and kill 'em. Cheery amusement, charming hobby. The terriers will get bitten on the nose, and as soon as that happens they'll see red. Then they'll start to kill; and once they've done that there will be no holding them. Their tails will be stickin' up above their heads."

"It was done a few weeks ago up the line, wasn't it?" The second-in-command thoughtfully replenished his glass.

"I believe it was—but what matter? The Stick-'ems don't require any damned pilot for their fences." The C.O. brought a fist like a leg of mutton down on the table. "Before the division leaves the line, we are going to visit the Hun; we are going to kill the Hun; we are going to capture the swab, to wound him, to out him; and when we've done it and got him as wild as a civet cat in the nesting season, we'll laugh at him by platoons."

"Prolonged applause from a breathless audience," laughed the Adjutant. "We can merely murmur a Benedictined Bismillah." . . .

Now it is possible that to those who sit at home, and regard war from arm-chairs as a movement of little flags on a large-scale map, the words of Toby Seymour may come in the nature of a surprise. It is possible that they have never really thought about the human side of killing: of killing as a hobby—as

a trade. Vaguely they realise that a soldier does not go into the army to pick buttercups; vaguely they understand that men die and are killed in war, and that soldiers are the people who kill and are killed. But I venture to think that they do not realise the intense importance of inculcating in every private soldier the necessity and the desire of outing the other fellow. Horrible, you say; revolting. Of course it's horrible, my good man; of course it's revolting; but what the devil do you think this war is—minding a crèche for imbecile children? *You* bring in a crowd of men whose sole qualification in August 1914 to be considered soldiers was an intense and national love of games. *You* pit them against a machine perfect in technique, in which every part had been trained from earliest infancy in the trade of soldiering, and the trade of ruthless killing.

You ask them to go across the water and beat this machine for *you*. And so, if I harry you at times with details of the type blood-curdling, it is only that you may understand something of the nature of the task: the task which *your* brothers and sons and partners and clerks are carrying to a successful issue.

Has it occurred to you why they are succeeding?

You say that right is triumphing over might; that a good cause must win. It is beautiful, it is magnificent your contention; but it is not war. History does not support you; common sense does not bear you out. We are beating them because as a nation

of sportsmen the men have taken to the new sport as a duck takes to water; and the new sport is to kill, capture, wound, or out the Boche before he kills, captures, wounds, or outs you. And having taken to it as a sport, now that the technique and other things are equal, we are better at it than the Hun who views it as a business.

Which recalls to mind the celebrated utterance of a celebrated officer. Should he read these lines, I trust he will pardon the plagiarism; but the utterance was so wonderful that it should be perpetuated, even thus modestly. He spoke lightly; but if I may be forgiven the platitude, there is many a true word spoken in jest.

Why not institute, he suggested, a list of battalion averages? Just as the relative position of Tottenham Hotspur and Sheffield Wednesday in the Football League is the subject of frenzied back chat; just as the defeat of Yorkshire by Kent causes head shakings in the public-houses of the North towards the end of August, why not have a league of battalions?

A wonderful idea if one thinks into it. A dead'un two points, a prisoner one; the Ober-lieutenant five points and a Colonel twenty—with other grades according to fancy. Think of the frantic excitement in the London clubs and the quiet villages when the relative scoring merits of a Jaeger sharpshooter and a one-eyed Landsturmer were sized up. Think of the Putney Peashooters' ladies meeting those of the Shoreditch Snipers at a small and early, and counting

up the bag : five Saxons and a stretcher-bearer against four prisoners and a carrier pigeon.

One might almost wind up with England *versus* Scotland, the winner to play Australia on a percentage basis. In fact, there is no limit to it ; and I will cease, lest I get lost in a maze of wonderful developments.

I will cease, and return to the Stick'ems ; but as a last word I would say, in all seriousness, that wildly farcical though that celebrated utterance may be, there underlies it an absolutely true valuation of the fundamental bed-rock of war. To emulate the deeds of others and go one better, to put the men in good heart with their tails up, that is the secret of winning. And the best way of doing it is to treat the matter as a sport : the Englishman understands it that way best. . . .

VI

THE SECOND LESSON, AND SOME FURTHER SIDE-ISSUES

No Man's Land in that part of the line where the South Devons resided was wide—well over a quarter of a mile to be exact. Across their front, about a hundred and fifty yards from the German lines, there

ran a small bank two or three feet high, with its right resting on a main road which crossed No Man's Land, and its left gradually falling away till it came level with the ground. The remnants of a hedge and two or three forlorn tree stumps still remained on the bank, over the top of which could be seen the German wire—running round a small orchard in which lay their front line trenches. The locality was peaceful; the Hun was quiet, asking for nothing more than that he should be left alone, which undoubtedly made Toby Seymour's breach of the rules the more reprehensible from the exclusively Teuton point of view. They were extremely angry; in fact, one large prisoner went so far as to state that it was a barbarous method of fighting, and unheard of in civilised warfare. The suggestion that he should be kept as the battalion mascot and supply the comic relief at all subsequent smoking concerts, unfortunately fell through. Other "non-barbarians" who escaped joining him in captivity emulated his altruistic spirit by informing the South Devons daily from a position where the lines ran close together, that they were looking forward to crucifying the next Englishman they caught, which again was an immense success, and was greeted invariably by a specially selected choir chanting the Hymn of Hate. And yet the damage done was not very great from the material point of view. It was the mental jolt, the jar to their spiritual loftiness, that tickled the dear souls up. . . .

Now primarily my story concerns Reginald Simp-

kins and his transformation to manhood. And therefore, before I tell of the raid itself, I will touch on one or two matters concerning that transformation, and the methods of the Honourable James.

D Company won the toss, so to speak, and was deputed to perform; and Reginald Simpkins was not in D Company. Being a sniper, he was attached to that mystic band of specialists who adorn battalion headquarters. And so, one morning, the snipers were assembled and the Adjutant gazed at them benignly through his eyeglass.

"D Company are going to raid the Huns," he remarked. "I want six volunteers to go with them." The result was as he anticipated. "I said six, not the whole bunch," he continued genially, "so I'll have to draw lots."

Now nothing would induce me to hint that everything was not perfectly square in that drawing, but —Reginald Simpkins was one of the six. In due course his part in the programme was explained to him, and during the explanation his face became more and more suggestive of a street corner on a rainy day.

"You understand what you have to do, Simpkins?" The Honourable James looked at him keenly.

"Yes, sir, I understand; but—but—ain't I to have a go at the swine at all?" Our friend's grievance boiled over. "Can't I just go into the trench once and have a go at them? It'll be a bit hard sitting by the tree stump, and hearing the boys at it, and having

to . . . ." His words died away under the steady glance of the man opposite.

"And because it's a bit hard, you don't want to do it?"

"It ain't that, sir, it's—it's——"

"Well, what is it? Not the showy part of the performance, eh? Not the part where the fun comes—sitting by a bank and taking the roll as they come back. But some one has to do it—why not you?"

The second lesson in the making of a soldier—subordination of self. . . . As a matter of fact there was no reason why Reginald should have been deputed to the job: there were many others who could have done it equally well if not better. But the Honourable Jimmy had his own methods. . . .

The desire for the game was there in the pupil: that he knew: the point was whether the character which would suppress and master that desire when necessary was there too. Could reliability be added to keenness? . . .

That was what the Adjutant wished to find out. He knew that our friend was—in the vernacular—throwing a chest. He knew that lately, well, Reginald Simpkins had been rather full of—Reginald Simpkins. Adjutants—good Adjutants—do know these things. Which was all to the good—within certain limits. . . .

An unpromising subject had learned the first lesson of the soldier: would he be able to learn the second, without which the third and greatest would be im-

possible? All soldiers *must* learn the first lesson; only a limited number *can* learn the second and third.

So it came about that for the good of his soul Reginald played a very minor part in this raid, and my information on the doings that occurred in the Hun lines was obtained from the lips of one Samuel Pipston, sometime auctioneer's assistant, who had joined the battalion with the last draft. He was just a second Reginald—one stage behind him in development, that's all—an apathetic lad, finding war a tedious operation.

It was not until ten o'clock on the night, as he lay with his party behind the bank of which I have spoken, that a pleasurable thrill of anticipation began to take hold of Samuel. A slight frost nip was in the air, and in the sky there shone a myriad stars. Away behind him lay the trenches he had just quitted, peaceful and still in the faint moonlight; and looking to his front he could see the German lines, just as still, only much closer. He tried to realise that he was shortly going to be inside those trenches, and that when he got there he would meet real live men, who would endeavour to kill—him, Samuel Pipston. He thought of Mary Johnston, the daughter of the leading grocer, and wondered what she was doing at the moment, and what she would think if——

"Don't shoot—for God's sake—not a sound." With a start Samuel heard the hoarse whisper of a subaltern beside him, and became suddenly aware that a struggle was going on two or three yards

away. He peered eagerly in the direction of the noise, and saw three men in a confused mass heaving on the ground behind the bank.

"What the devil——" he muttered, and then the heaving ceased. In the dim light he saw a still figure lying on the ground, and two men crouching over him. "Someone 'ad a fit, I reckons," he whispered to the man next him, an old hand at the game.

"Fit be blowed. It's a 'Un, yer fool—or was before he 'opped it. He's dead."

"A 'Un!" Samuel gazed stupidly at the speaker, and then peered at the motionless figure. "Wot's the sargint a-doin' of."

A low question came from the officer. "Have you killed him, Melstead?"

"I have that, sir; but I can't get my perishing bayonet out. Put your foot on his chest, Charlie, and heave. Again, so, heave." The sergeant sat down suddenly as the bayonet came out, and immediately crawled to the subaltern. "There'll be another with him, sir, for a cert." The two peered over the bank towards the German lines, while drawn by an irresistible impulse Samuel crept towards the dead man. He peered into the distorted face, he looked at the still twitching body, and an uncontrollable fit of shuddering took him and gripped him. His knees knocked together; his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth; and only one coherent thought hammered at his brain.

"Lemme get away; it's awful. Gawd! it's

awful. Lemme go." He was whispering and muttering to himself, and Heaven knows what might have happened, because there are moments when a man is not responsible for his actions, when a large body hit him on the head, and he found himself at the bottom of a mass of struggling, kicking men.

As a matter of fact it was merely the expected arrival of number two of the German patrol, and he could not have selected a better place to come to as far as Samuel was concerned. There is no better banisher of knocking knees than a heavy kick in the ribs from a German boot, and in an instant our friend was fighting like a tiger cat.

"Quietly, quietly, for the love of Heaven." The officer's insistent voice reached him, and he felt for the German's mouth with his hands. He was lying on his back, and the Hun was on top of him; but beyond that, the only other clear remembrance of the episode he has is of a fine and complete set of teeth nearly meeting in his hand. That was enough; one new terrier at any rate was blooded. He don't quite know how he killed him; in fact, it is quite on the cards that it wasn't he who killed him at all. The fact remains that the German died; and whether it was the sergeant, or whether it was the subaltern, or whether it was Samuel, is immaterial. All that matters is that as far as motive and endeavour went Samuel Pipston killed his first rat, and gloried in the operation. Such is the effect of mistaking the thumb of even our nearest and dearest for a ration biscuit. . . .

Thus ended the little episode of the German patrol. For months previously those two men, or others like them, had wandered over No Man's Land, and returned in due course to their sausage and their beer, with nothing of interest to report. Then, as the invariable rule of war, there came the hundredth time when the unexpected happened. Shells, bombs, bullets—they take the others and pass you by. But sooner or later, it will be "nah-poo." You can only pray Heaven it's a Blighty. With the German patrol, it was not.

A whispered word came down the waiting line. "Get ready." All along the bank men tightened their belts and took a last look at their bombs and rifles. Two parties—each under a subaltern—were going to enter the German lines, while, as a reserve, the Company Commander, with a machine gun and some rifle grenadiers, *and* Reginald Simpkins were remaining at the bank. The two parties were going to enter at different points and move towards one another, the leading men of each ceaselessly calling out, "'Ow's yer father?" Then when the mystic answer came, "Merry and bright," they would know they were meeting one another and be careful with their bombs. *En passant*, it is not too easy to recognise who's who at night in a strange trench when every one is somewhat excited.

"Are you all ready, 'A' party? Then come on." Worming over the bank Samuel followed his subaltern into the darkness, and the raid had begun. Without a sound they approached the wire through which

they had to cut, crawling as they had practised. Timed to a nicety they reached it and lay still, just as a couple of flashes from the rear proclaimed the gunners were beginning. Five—six—seven seconds, and with a shrill scream two shells whistled over their heads and burst fifty yards in front of them.

"Come on." The whisper was hardly audible, and quite unnecessary: they had all been too well drilled. Snip—snip; the wire strands parted as they forced their way through to the silent lines, while the shells still moaned over their heads; and the German sentries, who had heard shells before and liked them no more than any one else, kept their heads down till the English swine should have concluded their nightly hate. Three minutes later the party dropped into a deserted bit of trench and the fun commenced. . . .

Samuel was a bomber, and he carried twenty of these pleasant little instruments as his stock in trade. With every nerve tingling with excitement he followed the officer in front of him, who with a couple of bayonet men headed the party. The first man they met was the sentry, who was crouching on the fire-step to avoid the shelling, and from that moment on —well, things hummed.

The subaltern—an excitable youth—smiled genially at the dazed Bavarian, who was regarding the sudden invasion of his privacy as if it was a bad dream; and having shot him in the stomach, passed breezily on round the traverse, followed by his surging mob.

"Picket the other entrance," he roared to those behind, as he stepped by the first shaft of a dug out, up which a man was rushing. "Come on, my pet, come on—roll, bowl, or pitch, it's a cocoa-nut to a berlud orange. . . ." The man fell back with a bullet through his brain, and slid head down to the bottom of the shaft. "Bomb 'em, boys; bomb 'em."

With a roar the bombs went off in the confined space below the ground; the lights went out, and a confused medley of shouts and groans followed them up the trench as they sought pastures new. Control was impossible: it was every man for himself, and to hell with everything he could see. Each man fought his own little battle, in his own little way, against one or two or three of the bewildered men who appeared suddenly from odd places. And though they were bewildered, they fought—those Huns: fought like good 'uns. In one corner a great burly miner grappled with a Bavarian N.C.O. who had suddenly dropped over the back of the trench armed only with a pick—straight from a working party. Farther on, the subaltern and a bayonet man carried on the good work with howls of joy, while a small party of bombers, having found a large sump pit covered by boards in a communication trench, removed the boards just in time to catch a relief party of six who came rushing up the trench. With a resounding splash they went through the ice several feet below the top of the hole, and were immediately joined by two bombs.

As the corporal in charge of that party put it

afterwards: "It was a good idea that sump 'ole; because them that wern't killed by the bombs was drowned, and the only one wot was neither, I 'it over the 'ead with me gun; and 'ere he is. Ain't 'e a little dear?" The little dear with a cracked jaw, and a face reminiscent of Hindenburg on the morning after, looked the part. . . .

But I have neglected Samuel Pipston. As I mentioned, he was a bomber, and he was also excited. In the general confusion and darkness he got parted from the rest of the gallant band, and found himself in a bit of trench alone save for a large and morose sapper who was tenderly nursing a mobile charge of several pounds of ammonal. Away in front the noise and shouting and the crack of bursting bombs was getting fainter, and Samuel was undecided. He had explored a little *cul-de-sac* on his own, and had drawn blank; and at the moment he was in the unfortunate predicament of thirsting for blood and being unable to get any. In front the trench was being cleared up; behind it had been cleared up; wherefore Samuel stood undecided, and cursed fluently.

"Shut yer mouth"—the morose sapper gripped his arm—"an' listen. I heard some of the swine, I reckons."

Silently the two men stood in the trench, and suddenly from close at hand there came the noise of a man climbing a dug-out shaft. It was exactly as a faint cry of "'Ow's yer father?" came from a long way off that a curtain just beside them moved, and a man, crouching slightly, came out of a screened dug-

out shaft into the trench. It must be remembered that neither of our warriors had a rifle, and that bombs and ammonal charges are not weapons with which to tackle a man you can touch. They are apt to be impartial to friend and foe alike. . . . Resource was necessary, and it is at moments such as these that the national instinct for games is so invaluable. There was a psychological moment as the crouching man came up into the trench with his rifle and bayonet, when his chin was in the perfect position : moreover, the sapper was a full back of merit. He kicked hard and true, and if any one doubts the effect of a service boot on the point of the jaw, no doubt he can experiment with the matter—at a small cost. The Bavarian fell forward as if he had been pole-axed, and having relieved him of his rifle the sapper held forth.

" There's a ruddy dug-out full of 'em, mate, wot was missed." They peered down the opening, where a faint light showed. " They think we've gone on, and they're coming up to see. Look, there's one."

The shadow of a man showed grotesquely in the flickering light, and Samuel quivered with excitement.

" I'm a-going down the plurry steps," he affirmed, " an' I'll bomb 'em from the bottom."

The next instant he was down the shaft and peering cautiously round the corner; and having peered he let out one wild whoop and gently lobbed his first bomb into the far corner. It was a bomber's paradise.

All round the walls in bunks were Bavarians—stout ones, thin ones, drunk ones, sober ones—and the bunks were arranged in tiers one above the other.

Two men were up, getting on their equipment, and evidently preparing to sally forth after the gentleman upstairs; but after the first bomb burst the fog of war descended on that Hun hostel. Samuel had just time to see the fearful mess up in the far corner before the light went out, and then things moved. Shots came whizzing past his head into the woodwork of the shaft, but Samuel didn't care a damn for shots; had he not been bitten in the hand less than an hour previously? Methodically he pulled out pins, and impartially he distributed his favours in every direction, what time he softly sang a song that had long been one of his favourites, and which dealt with the singer's overmastering predilection for "fish and chips."

Suddenly he found the sapper behind him. "Stand by to 'op it like a ruddy 'are," remarked that worthy tersely. "I'm a going to give 'em my little present from Brighton, and it won't be 'ealthy when it goes off."

There was a sudden sizzle as he lit the fuze, and he saw a stream of smoky light fly through the darkness and fall on to the ground in the centre of the dug-out. Then Samuel 'opped it, the sapper just behind him, up the shaft and into the trench. The sapper rushed him round a bend, and then crouched down.

"Twenty seconds," he gasped, "an' me out of training. Lumme! wot a life."

The next instant the ground quivered as if an earthquake had occurred; a thunderous roar shook the

air, while the blast of the explosion nearly knocked them down.

"Nothin' wrong with that there ammonal," remarked the Sapper professionally. "'Andy stuff it is too. Let's go and see what's 'appened."

But that they will never know. From the dug-out shaft a volume of smoke and dust was belching out, while from inside there came a medley of noises and grunts indicative of annoyance and pain.

"Sounds like one of them there gramophone records, don't it?" murmured Samuel. "A summer morning, or the departure of a troop ship. Ain't it lovely? 'Ullo, wot's that?"

Clear above the din and the moaning, and the spasmodic fighting which they could still hear going on up the trench, there sounded the officers' dinner call. Twice it blared forth from the British lines, and every man knew what it meant: "Come back, at once." The raid was over. . . .

And so by ones and two and threes D Company returned to the fold, where hot tea and a noggin of rum awaited them, giving their names to Reginald on the way. To the casual observer it might have seemed that D Company were drunk—one and all. They were—but not with wine. They were drunk with excitement, and with the knowledge just acquired that they could beat the Germans, man-to-man. They were blooded.

The lies they told—those cheery lads! Not a man had done in less than forty Boches, which rose to eighty when they wrote their girls. What matter?

D Company of the Stick'em and be damned was made for life. The men walked three inches higher ; the men, as men, had come into their own. Every new draft that came heard the story ; every new draft realised it had got something to live up to. No longer sand bags and smells their horizon, but the memory of one glorious half-hour.

And when he thought over it afterwards, there was only one small thing that struck Samuel Pipston as peculiar. He was just retailing to Reginald Simpkins —with some wealth of detail—his experiences in the German dug-out, when he became aware of the Honourable James beside him, who listened for a while until he had finished.

" So you had a good time did you, Pipston ? " he remarked. " Splendid ! " Then he turned to Simpkins. " The Company Commander tells me you were a great help to him, checking the men as they came back. Well done."

It struck Samuel that *he* might have had a " Well done."

But then, he didn't know the Honourable Jimmy's methods ; nor did he know that while he and those with him had merely learned the first and easiest lesson that night, Reginald Simpkins had learned the second.

VII

THE THIRD LESSON, AND A DIGRESSION

And so, with two of the lessons learned, we come to the third and greatest. The first was basely material, and was taught by Shorty Bill; the second was a little nearer the heart of things, and was taught by the Honourable James; the third *is* the heart of things, and can be taught by no one. The rules—vague rules—may be given by men who have learned it to those who have not; but its true meaning, its real significance, can only be reached by the pupil for himself. And there are many who fall by the way. . . .

It arises out of the second: it must be preceded by subordination of self. For until a man can subordinate himself, he cannot take on his shoulders the cares of others; he cannot put those others first. And until he can put others before him, he cannot be put in a position of responsibility: he is not fitted to fill it. And it is the principle of responsibility on which the British Army is built up: another thing about which I am very doubtful as to the knowledge of those whose paths have not led them near things military. . . .

I have touched on things material; let me hold forth awhile on things spiritual.

What think you, my masters, is the driving force of a regiment in the field? The answer is in one

word—Leadership. Quite so, you say; the remark seems to have been made before. It has, which makes it all the stranger that it is so little understood.

What does the word mean to you? Prancing in front of the men with a drawn sword, shouting, "For King and Country"? They'd laugh at you, and follow a—leader: one of their own. Ruling by fear, ruthlessly without thought of human weakness, without tinge of mercy? They'd hate you, and you would have to drive them like the Prussians do. Ruling by pusillanimous kindness, by currying favour, by seeking to be a popularity Jack? They'd despise you—and rightly.

The quality of leadership is none of these things: it is something much more simple, much more homely, if I may use the word. To lead men a man must first of all understand men, understand human nature; he must know his job, and know it better than his men; he must possess intensity of purpose.

Human nature! What the men like and what they dislike; the little fetishes they put up, the little gods; the few words of praise when they have done well, of disappointment when they have not; consideration for them, giving them beer and concerts; being with them in the trenches when the weather is bad, and not in a dug-out. Little points perhaps, but it's the little points that are so important.

Human sympathy—the appealing to the spark of better things that lies in the worst; the inculcation of an ideal to live up to—the ideal of the regiment. All the hundred and one things that go to make up

a man's life and not an automaton's; all the things that make for the affection and love of those under you. It is a very great thing for an officer to be loved by his men. . . .

Knowledge! The capability of doing yourself anything you call on those under you to do; of showing them when they are right and when they are wrong; of making them trust your ability. It is a very great thing for an officer to be trusted by his men. . . .

Intensity of purpose! The driving force that gives enthusiasm, that causes the hand on the plough to remain there until the job is done; the quality that abhors vacillation, that prevents a man taking a thing up one moment with red-hot eagerness and dropping it the next because he's tired of it. The men despise vacillation and chopping and changing. Being "messed about," they call it; only the word is not messed. And it is a terrible thing for an officer to be despised by his men. . . .

From good leadership there springs good discipline, that other word so little understood by those who have not met it in the flesh. Not, believe me, the rigorous punishment for breaking certain arbitrary rules, enforced by an autocrat on men placed temporarily under him by a whim of fate; far from it. Discipline is merely the doctrine which teaches of the subordination of self for the whole; it teaches the doctrine of playing the game; it teaches the all-important fact that the fear of being found out and punished should *not be* the chief force in a man's

life, but rather that the realisation of his responsibility should be the guiding factor.

Such is the ideal aimed at in a good regiment. That there are some who miss that aim none but a fool would deny; the same may be said of most professions, even, I suppose, of bishops. That there are some officers who go the wrong way to work, who nag and bully and generally turn themselves into something even worse than nature intended is an undoubted fact. That there are some men who are wasters; who were born wasters and will die as such is also quite true. But I maintain that the training, the ideals, the traditions, the morale of the good British regiment does produce, and has produced, a growth of character and a condition of mind in the men who belong to it which was largely conspicuous by its absence in civil life.

Why, I do not profess to say. Why the great thinkers and the vaporising burblers between them should not have hit on some method of training character which would have produced equally good results to those produced by what they are still pleased to call "militarism," I do not know. All that I do know is that they did not. Let us leave it at that.

I have digressed; our Reginald is calling. For weeks his battalion was destined to remain in peace trenches, to live that dreary life of monotony which tests the capabilities of the leader as no big push can do. The excitement is absent, there is

plenty of time—too much time—for thought. And boredom is of all things one of the hardest to combat. It calls for leadership of the highest type. There is many a man capable of supreme devotion in a crisis who is incapable of the steady, unseen strain, day in, day out, of keeping up his men's spirits—in fact, of appreciating human nature in one of its many phases.

The men feel that dull routine on which the limelight does not shine, and only the leader can help them. It claims its victims, just as do the big offensive, that trench life, when the flares lob up ceaselessly and the bursts of machine-gun fire come swishing over the ground. Here men are wiring; there is a party digging a new bit of trench; and out beyond—in No Man's Land—an officer and three scouts are creeping about examining the enemy's wire. So it goes on throughout the night, until as the first streaks of dawn show faintly in the east it ceases. The men come in, back to the dreary mud holes; and next night there is the same damned thing to be done all over again somewhere else. . . .

Only, Ginger won't be there any more; he has put up his last bit of wire. He started on the last journey unnoticed save by the man standing next him; and —Gawd above!—what's the use? They'd been together for two years, share and share alike; and now the end. Putting up a bit of rusty wire round a sap. . . .

"Easy, boy, easy. 'Ere, cut them ruddy braces away. 'Orl rite, old son, you've copped a Blighty.

Thro' yer stummik—Gor luv yer—no. Get that dressing on, Bill; turn over, mate—we'll give yer a drink in a minute; but one thing at a time, old pal, that's my motto. Always merry and bright, as the perisher said in the play." Back in the trench, pulled in from the wire where the work goes on, an officer's electric torch shines on the stretcher bearers working with clumsy gentleness on the quivering body. "Now, then, mate, we can't get the blinking stretcher along this 'ere trench, so we'll 'ave to carry you."

"Copped it?" asks an N.C.O. in a whisper.

"Gawd! a fair crumpler," mutters the other. "Come on, Ginger, let's get off on the first stage for Blighty. On me back, we does it—on me back. 'Ere, boy—lumme! turn 'im over, Bill." The torch shines down on the face upturned to the stars; the stretcher bearers bend down and suddenly straighten up again. For Ginger is even now passing along the last great road: he has copped it. The group disperse; the officer goes back to his job; the stretcher bearers do their work; and soon nothing remains save the stain on the dirty sandbags. Just another letter to a woman at home; just war.

Only to his pal, it's Ginger: Ginger whom he'd joined up with; Ginger—killed putting up a bit of rusty wire. Not doing anything brilliant, not in a charge or going over the top, but putting up a bit of ruddy wire. What is the use of it all, what? . . .

Come on, my leader; come on, you platoon commander; the soul of Ginger's pal is in the melting-pot, though he doesn't know it, and would curse in your

face if you told him so. A quiet hand on the back, a laugh perhaps, just a word to show him that you feel with him. His outlook on life is not as big as yours; help him—for Heaven's sake, help him. Thus is it done if the leader of the regiment is a man of understanding; for each of his assistants, right down the long chain to the junior lance-corporal, have been imbued with their responsibility to those under them. They are there to help them, to lighten their burdens, to sink self for the men they lead. The strong must help the weak—that is the principle; and every one must pull his weight for the good of the team.

But I have got off the rails again; I apologise.

During those weeks of boredom, Reginald, though he knew it not, was being watched, still watched, by the Honourable James. And it seemed to that judge of character that the soil was good.

"The Adjutant asked me if I'd like to take the stripe this morning, Shorty." Reginald and his pal were watching an inter-company football match on the ground by the Lens main road, near the little village of Noyelles-les-Vermelles. It is on the borders of the coal country—that village, and all around it rise the great pyramidical slag heaps of the pits.

"Did 'e now?" Shorty contemplated with interest a shell bursting on the derelict fosse in the next village of Annequin, and turned thoughtfully to the speaker. "An' what did you say to him?"

"I said I didn't want to. Why the devil should I?

I don't want a stripe, Bill—I'm happier as I am. It means a lot of extra work an' trouble, an'——"

"Did you tell him that, son?" Shorty Bill hooked himself over on his arm and proceeded to fill his pipe.

"Yes, I told him that: and he——"

He did not finish his sentence for a moment or two; he seemed to be turning something over in his mind. Then he burst out: "He talked a lot of rot about responsibility."

"Cut it out. It's you that is coughing up the rot. Listen here a moment, an' I'll tell you what the Honourable James said. Got a match?" He took the proffered box and carefully lit up. "He first-ways told you that he'd had his eye on you for some time, an' he was pleased with 'ow you was doing. That may have been a lie or it may not, but the Honourable Jimmy knows more'n one cottons to. Then he told you what a gran' thing it was to be in this regiment, and that to be in a position of responsibility was grander still. Then he told you that no man worthy of the name of a man ought to be afraid of shouldering responsibility. An' lastly he said: 'Will you take the stripe?'"

Reggie was staring at the speaker amazed. "Lumme! you might have been there, Shorty. How did you know?"

"Because he offered the same thing to me six months ago," returned the other shortly. "Now see here, boy: that there aristocratic Johnny is the goods. It don't matter a damn to me if a man's a duke or a coal-heaver as long as he's the goods, and

the Honourable Jimmy is. So's the ole man. An' what he says—goes. He's right d'you see, son; he's right." Shorty brought his fist down into his open palm. "I've been watching you lately, an' you're worth teaching—you've shown that. But now you've begun to feel your legs, you're inclined to think you're a bit bigger cheese-mite than you really are. You want a bit o' sobering up; an' there's nothing like taking on responsibility to sober up a man. As soon as you start looking after other fellows, you begin to realise you ain't the Lord High Emperor of the whole outfit."

"But I don't want to look after other fellows, Shorty." Our friend's tone was dubious. "Why, good Lord! I'd be bossing it over you if I took the stripe."

An enigmatic smile wreathed gently over Shorty's face. "Don't you worry about that; I'll chance it." Then he turned suddenly on the man lying beside him. "You've got to take it—this bally little stripe in this funny old army. Otherwise you're a quitter—see? a quitter. You'd not be pullin' your weight. Do you get me?"

"Right ho! Bill; I'll tell him I will." Reginald Simpkins stared silently at the football match for a while, and then a sudden thought struck him. "Say, why didn't *you* take it, Shorty?"

"Never you mind; there are things as you can't get a hold of as yet. I pull more weight where I am, my son, than I would if I was the ruddy sergeant-major himself."

With which sage utterance our friend had to rest content. But while we are on the question, it is passing strange that, in a community such as a regiment, the power of the old soldier should be as great as it is. There was but little exaggeration in Shorty's last remark. In his present position he exercised a far greater influence on the men around him than if he had been a sergeant. It was his individuality—an individuality which made him an oracle whom all approached with their little grievances and their little troubles. Had he been a senior N.C.O. there would have been the bar of rank; and though his influence would have been very great, now it was even greater. But with our friend the case was different. He had no such individuality developed as yet which marked him out at once as a man among men; and before he could become an oracle to whom others would turn in their troubles, he must first be given a helping hand—shown a short cut, so to speak—to the character on which men lean instinctively.

And there is only one way to produce that character—only one. It may succeed and it may fail; the shrewdest judges of human character make mistakes, the best leaders err sometimes. But—give him responsibility, and help him to understand that responsibility, with the help that only a good leader can give. Help him to grasp that phrase—*My* men; help him to realise that their worries are his worries, their amusements his amusements; help him to understand the value of cheerfulness when everything is damnable—utterly damnable. Then watch him.

He may fail; well, you've made a mistake; but he may succeed, and then you've made a man. Which is always a thing worth doing. . . .

VIII

THE THIRD LESSON IS LEARNED

And so it came about that three months later Reginald Simpkins—lance-corporal—and Shorty Bill—private—were seated on the fire-step of a trench side by side. With one continuous droning roar the shells passed over their heads and crumped into the German lines opposite. The days of peace for the battalion were over; in a quarter of an hour they were going over the top. Thousands like them sat on similar fire-steps and realised that same fact, for it was no little show this time: it was one where divisions and corps were involved. But to the pawns in the game, the horizon is limited: it is just their own destination, their own life, their own fate that looms up big and blots out the rest. It's not the other hundred thousand who matter at the moment—it's the pawn himself who wonders, and laughs, and sings, and prays. . .

Shorty, smoking his pipe imperturbably, was feeling the edge of his own particular weapon, with

critical finger, and every now and then stealing a look at the boy beside him. Apparently satisfied at last with its sharpness he laid it down on the step and turned to our friend.

"You done well, son," he remarked at length, thoughtfully removing his pipe. "I'm pleased with you. I was afraid at one time—just after you took the stripe—when some of 'em was ragging you, as you would turn out a quitter. But you got guts. You're twice the man you was when you took it; and as for what you was when you joined us, you wasn't nothing at all save a walking disease."

"I'm glad you think I've made good, Shorty." Reginald was swallowing a little hard. "I—er—I—Good God! Shorty, I'm just sick with funk—that's straight." It was out at last, and Shorty Bill smiled gently and nodded his head.

"Son," he remarked, "it's one good sign that you ain't afraid o' saying so. Now personally I'm not—though it ain't no credit to me. It's how we're made, I reckon. When my time comes, it comes, and there's no blamed use worrying."

"I know all that, but—somehow—it ain't much comfort that idea, when it comes to the point. I tell you, Shorty, I don't want to be killed; I——" His voice died away, and he looked shamefacedly at the sandbags in front of him.

"No more don't I, son; no more don't I. An' no more don't your men—your six boys you are responsible for. They're your men, that little bunch: they're looking to you, they're relying on you." He

put his hand on the other's knee. "Are you a'-goin' to let 'em down, that six?"

Once again the great doctrine—the third great lesson—the doctrine that laughs at life and death, the doctrine of thinking for others—of responsibility.

"It's better, I reckon, to die a man than live a worm. So long, son; time's up."

The last words were shouted, and even then they could not be heard. Five minutes previously it would have seemed impossible that there could have been more noise; then suddenly it seemed to double and treble in intensity. The ground shook; and over the German trenches there hung a choking cloud of fumes which drifted slowly across the front with the wind. As if by clockwork, the men got out of their trenches and walked slowly over No Man's Land behind the creeping barrage towards the reeking caldron. A great long line of men—thousands and thousands of men; but do not think of them as the men of "some of our county regiments who did well, whom we are now allowed to mention"; as some "kilted battalions and Canadians who greatly distinguished themselves"; do not think of them in the mass, rather think of the individual.

The farm-hand, until two years ago just a clod-hopping countryman, was there; and the local lawyer's articled clerk. The gillie from a Scotch stream, and the bar-tender from a Yukon saloon walked side by side; and close to them a High Church curate in a captain's uniform grinned pleasantly

and strolled on. The sheep-rancher, the poacher, the fifth son of an impecunious earl, and the man from the chorus were all there—leaving their respective lives behind them, the things which they had done, good and bad, the successes and the failures. For the moment nothing mattered save that seething volcano in front: it might be the end—it might not.

And some were quiet, and some were green; some were shouting, and some were red; some laughed, and some cursed. But whatever they did, however they took it, the leaders of whom I have spoken, each in his own sphere, big or little as the case might be, kept 'em, held 'em, looked after 'em, cheered 'em. Though their own stomachs were turning, though their own throats were dry, they had a job to do: a responsibility rested on their shoulders. And until death relieved them of that responsibility they could not lay it down. They were the leaders; to them much had been given; of them much was expected. . . .

But in this great advance, which has already been ably portrayed by the powers of the journalistic world, we are only concerned with the fortunes of two individuals. To them those flowery phrases, those magnificent "dashes carried out in faultless style," those wonderful "lines which went into the jaws of hell as if on parade," would have conveyed a peculiarly inept description of their feelings. Not that the descriptions in many cases are not wonderfully good! They are—but they represent the point of view

of the spectator in a pageant ; not the point of view of one of the actors. To him they are meaningless : he only knows the intense vital part he plays himself. The shell that burst next door to him and killed his sergeant is only one of similar thousands to the looker-on behind. . . .

And so, in a dazed world of his own, Reginald Simpkins, Lance-Corporal and sometime pride of Mogg's, walked over No Man's Land. Every now and then he looked mechanically to his left and right, and grinned. At least he made a contortion with his facial muscles, which experience told him used to produce a grin. He did it to encourage the six. Whether he succeeded or not is immaterial : the intention was good, even if the peculiar tightness of his skin spoiled the result. Occasionally he spoke. No one could have heard what he said, but once again the intention was good.

" Steady, boys—come on." He said it four or five times and punctuated it with grins. Then he tripped over a body and cursed.

He wondered if he was doing all right ; he wondered if Shorty was pleased with him. The funk seemed to have gone : in its place had come a kind of dazed doggedness, while a fury of impatience to justify himself and his powers of leadership shook him at times. Surely to God they could go faster than this cursed crawl. Why was the barrage lifting so slowly ? It seemed interminable that walk over the torn-up earth ; and yet the German trenches were still some way off.

He grinned again, and turned round just in time to see the garage assistant next to him fall forward into a shell hole, and lie with his head stuck in the slimy ooze at the bottom. He frowned, and then almost uncomprehendingly he saw the back of the fallen man's head. Of course—he was shot, that's what it was: his six were reduced to five.

"Steady, boys—come on." As he spoke he felt something catch his coat, and he looked down irritably on feeling the material tear. It was a strand of barbed wire that stuck up from the ground, with its free end loose. They had come to the wire. . . .

In all directions—twisted and torn, with ends that stuck up, and stray strands uncut—was wire: thick and rusty it coiled in and out between the screw pickets—cut to pieces, but still there. Men picked their way over it gingerly, stepping with care and walking round the little ridges that separated the shell holes. Festoons of it lay in these holes, and in one large crater a dead Hun lay sprawled on a mattress of it. To the spectator behind, it was one dead Hun—one of thousands. To the man who happened to see him as he passed, it was an individual whose chalky face had been ripped by one of the barbs as he fell. And there is a difference. . . .

Then they came to the trenches—the front line, or what was left of it. Just facing them a man with his hands above his head opened and shut his mouth. He appeared to be saying something, but no voice could be heard above the din. Reginald grinned again: the Hun who was trying to imitate a fish

struck him as a humorous spectacle; moreover, in a flash of memory, he reminded him very much of Mr. Mogg's ample wife. He grinned again as he thought of Mogg's.

Once more they were advancing again over the other side of the trench: the moppers-up would attend to the piscatorial gentleman. Our friend was better now—very much better; he felt more sure of himself; in fact, absolutely sure of himself. In addition he was beginning to get excited. And then a machine gun opened fire.

Hundreds of other machine guns opened fire too; but this one was Reginald's machine gun—the one that concerned his limited horizon. For a moment it did not strike him that way, though he saw the gun quite clearly. He looked round for help, and in looking round for help, he found that his five and three others who were close to him were looking to *him* for help. And he realised his responsibility: he had learned the lesson. . . .

It was a masterly little piece of work: an excellent piece of subordinate leadership. With his arm he directed those eight—he had not been trained as a scout in vain—and with the loss of only two he got them out of the direct zone of fire. A few minutes later he, with the six remaining, fell upon that gun's team from a flank. In five seconds it was over, and the little group passed on.

It was just after this that he saw Shorty. At the moment that worthy was lying in a shell hole drawing a bead on some target with the utmost care. Reggie

saw the kick of the gun, but failed to see what he had been firing at until the firer stood up and screamed in his ear.

"Machine gunner—nest of them over there. Hanging up the ruddy advance."

"We're doing well, Shorty." He howled back the answer.

"I reckon so. The swine are running all along the line; only one or two of 'em holdin' us up. Look out." He pulled Reginald to one side, and pointed behind him.

Majestically, squelching through the mud, came Tiny Tim, or the Tired Tank. It was pitching and rolling like a squat old tramp making heavy weather beating up Channel. They waved at it as it passed by, lurching ominously but going straight for the machine-gun nest. Once it almost seemed to disappear as it waddled down an extra large hole with its two stern wheels waving foolishly in the air; but a moment later it squirmed solemnly up the far side, and rolled on to its chosen target. The wire was uncut; but it trod on the wire, and the wire was not.

"Look at the perishers running," howled Shorty, as he watched some men doubling back from the death-trap. Their arms were waving foolishly: one could imagine their faces grey-green with terror, their hoarse shouts of fear, their desperate hurry to avoid the thing that was coming. "Lumme! I must draw a bead on that bunch," muttered Shorty eagerly. "Now then, son, you can hit one of that

lot." He turned from the scene in front, and the next instant he was down on his knees. "What is it, boy, what is it?"

The man lying stiffly on the ground grinned yet once again, and shook his head. Thus does it come —suddenly, in a second. To the spectator behind— "our losses were not as great as had been anticipated." To the man—journey's end.

"I've got it this time, Shorty," he remarked, and he seemed to speak with difficulty. The roar of the guns was passing onwards, the din was not quite so deafening. "My bally old back seems all numb."

Just a stray bullet; just a broken back; just a finish. With the eye of knowledge Shorty looked at the grey tinge already spreading over the boy's face, and the mystery of death struck him forcibly: something of the strangeness of it all. In five minutes —four—ten—what matter?—the lips now capable of speech would close for ever: the man whom he had known and lived alongside of for months would be gone for good. The desperate finality of it; the utter futility of the onlooker. . . .

"Is the Tank clearing 'em out, Shorty?" The dying man interrupted his thoughts, and he looked up to see what was happening.

"It is that, son; it's doing fine. The old thing is sittin' there like a broody hen spittin' at 'em, and the swine are running like hell."

"God! Shorty, could one hit 'em with a gun?" The glazing eyes brightened; the lolling head straightened with a jerk.

"Sure thing." Shorty looked at him, and understood. "Like to try, boy; you'd get the cocoa-nut, I'll bet."

"That's it, Shorty; that's it. Turn me over, an' prop me up. "I'd like to. . . . Lord! man, I can see 'em there, hundreds of 'em running to beat the band. Give me the gun, Bill, quick; I must just get one; I. . . ."

With powerless hands he took the rifle for the last time, and looked along the sights. "God!" he whimpered, "I can't hold it steady—I can't. . . . Shorty, Shorty, I'm wobbling all over the target."

But Shorty did not come to him. He was lying on the ground two or three feet away, with his own rifle hugged to his shoulder. "If there be anything in religion," he muttered fiercly, "let me shoot straight this time, God."

"That's all right," he shouted; "you've got him covered fine. Fire, son, fire—an' hit the perisher. You ain't wobbling."

And so Reginald Simpkins, lance-corporal and man, fired his last shot. Heaven knows where it went; all that matters is that a running grey-green figure two hundred yards away suddenly threw his hands above his head and pitched forward on his face.

"Great shooting, son, great shooting." Shorty Bill was beside him, turning him over once again on his back. "You plugged him clean as a whistle. Good boy."

The grey had spread; the end was very near. "I

thought I heard—another shot—close by." The tired eyelids closed. "I've made good, Shorty, ain't I? . . . Honourable Jimmy . . . Regiment great thing . . . responsibility . . . greater. . . ." And so he died.

IX

"AND OTHER FELL ON GOOD GROUND"

SHORTY BILL thoughtfully ejected a spent cartridge case from his magazine and pulled back the safety catch. "I'm glad I hit him. It'll be something for the boy to take away with him. I suppose he'll remember it." Shorty's brow wrinkled with the strain of this abstruse theological problem. Then he shrugged his shoulders and gave it up. "So long, son; you made good—you did well. But the old Tank has cleared 'em out, an' I must be toddling on." Then he remembered something, and produced his own patent weapon. It was only as he actually started to cut another nick in the long row which adorned the stock of his rifle that he paused: paused and looked up.

"Lumme! I'd better wait a bit; it wouldn't never do for the boy to know it was me what hit that Hun. I'll just go on a little, I'll . . . Good-bye, boy; I'm sorry—dam sorry."

With his strange, loping walk the poacher and

jailbird walked off in the wake of the Tank, which was now ploughing merrily forward again. Fifty yards away he stopped, and cut another nick. "Ninety-three," he muttered; "not bad. But it wouldn't never have done for the boy to have known." Undoubtedly theology was not his strong point.

. . . .

Slowly, an inch or two at a time, Reginald Simpkins slithered down the sloping side of the shell hole till he reached the bottom. To the batches of prisoners coming back—just a casualty; to the reinforcements coming up—just a casualty. To the boy himself—the great price.

And so, in the shell-ploughed, gun-furrowed No Man's Land is the seed of Britain sown. And the harvest——?

PART IV

HARVEST

"Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn."

MATTHEW xiii. 30.

HARVEST

" For shoulders curved with the counter stoop will be carried erect and square;
And faces white from the office light will be bronzed by the open air;
And we'll walk with the stride of a new-born pride, with a new-found joy in our eyes;
Scornful men who have diced with death under the naked skies.

" For some of us smirk in a chiffon shop, and some of us teach in a school;
Some of us help with the seat of our pants to polish an office stool;
The merits of somebody's soap or jam some of us seek to explain;
But all of us wonder what we'll do when we have to go back again."—R. W. SERVICE.

WHAT of the harvest? It is coming, perhaps sooner than we expect, perhaps not for many weary months. But the reaper is even now sharpening his sickle in readiness, and—what of the crops?

Into No Man's Land have gone alike, the wheat of honest endeavour and hardship well borne, and the tares of class hatred and selfishness. Had ever reaper nobler task in front of him than the burning of those tares and the gathering of that wheat into the nation's barn? . . .

In the Château at Boesinghe, where the moss is growing round the broken doors and the rank weeds

fill the garden, with the stagnant Yser hard by; in Ypres, where the rooks nest in the crumbling Cloth Hall and a man's footsteps ring loud and hollow on the silent square; in Vermelles, where the chalky plains stretch bare towards the east, and the bloody Hohenzollern redoubt, with the great squat slag heap beside it, lies silent and ominous; in Guillemont and Guinchy, where the sunken road was stiff with German dead and no two bricks remain on top of one another; on Vimy Ridge, in Bullecourt and Croisilles, in all these places, in all the hundred others, the seed has been sown. What of the harvest?

If I have made of war a hideous thing—unredeemed, repulsive—the picture is not consciously exaggerated. As far as in me lies I have drawn the thing as I have seen it.

But after the lean years, the fat; after the hideous sowing, the glorious aftermath.

The more one thinks of it, the more amazing does the paradox become—the paradox of cause and effect. To fit these civilians of Britain for all the dirty details which go to make winning or losing, to fit them for the business of killing in the most efficient manner, the tuition must include the inculcation of ideals—more, the assimilation of ideals—which are immeasurably superior to any they learned in their civilian life. At least so it seems to one who makes their acquaintance when they first join up. In their civilian life self ruled; there, each individual pawn scrambled and snarled as he pushed the next pawn to him under — or went under himself

as the case might be—in his frenzied endeavour to better himself, to win a little brief authority! The community was composed of a mass of struggling, fighting units, each one all out for himself and only himself.

But from the tuition which the manhood of Britain is now undergoing, there must surely be a very different result. Self no longer rules; self is sunk for the good of the cause—for the good of the community. And the community, realising that fact, endeavours, by every means in its power, to develop that self to the very maximum of which it is capable, knowing that, in due course, it will reap the benefit. No longer do individual pawns struggle one against the other, but each—developing his own particular gift to the maximum—places it at the disposal of the community who helped him in his development. And that is the result of so-called militarism—*British* militarism.

Surely what has been accomplished in the Army can be carried into other matters in the fullness of time. I am no prophet; I am no social reformer to speak of ways and means. All I can say with certainty is that I have seen them come in by hundreds, by thousands—these men of our country now fighting in every corner of the globe—resentful, suspicious, intolerant of authority. I have seen them in training; I have seen the finished article. And the result is good: the change for the better wonderful.

It cannot be that one must presuppose such a

hideous thing as this war to be necessary, in order to attain such results. I cannot believe it. There must be some other method of teaching the lessons of playing for the side and unselfishness. The spurred culprits of Mr. Wells' imagination have given a lead over the fence; surely all the rest of the field is not going to jib.

And when the harvest does come in, when the sickle is finally put to the crop, there will be such an opportunity for statesmanship as the world has never before seen.

Winnowed by the fan of suffering and death, the wheat of the harvest will shed its tares of discord and suspicion. The duke and the labourer will have stood side by side, and will have found one another —men. No longer self the only thing; no longer a ceaseless growse against everybody and everything; no longer an instinctive suspicion of the man one rung higher up the ladder. But more self-reliant and cheery; stronger in character and bigger in outlook; with a newly acquired sense of self-control and understanding; in short, grown a little nearer to its maximum development, the manhood of the nation will be ripe for the moulder's hand. It has tasted of discipline; it has realised that only by discipline for the individual can there be true freedom for the community; and that without that discipline, chaos is inevitable. Pray heavens there be a moulder—a moulder worthy of the task.

"Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the

same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?"

He will have grand clay—that moulder: clay such as has never been known before. Its God will be the God of Reality, its devil the Devil of Pretence. Just as it has ceased to look at Death through a haze of drawn window-blinds and frock-coats redolent of moth-balls, so it will cease with scorn to look at some of the clumsy sophistries of modern life through the rose-tinted spectacles so kindly provided for the purpose by men of great vocal, and correspondingly small mental, power.

Out of the evil, good will come: surely it must be so. In the wisdom of the Infinite Power, madness has been let loose on the world. The madness was not of our seeking. It was hurled upon us by a race whose standards are based on bombing or crucifying their prisoners, and eating their own dead; on sinking unarmed liners and murdering an odd woman or two to fill in time; and finally—though perhaps last on the list of witticisms from a material point of view, almost first from that of contempt—of crucifying an emaciated cat and stuffing a cigar in its mouth. A race without an instinct of sport, without an idea of playing the game. Gross and contemptible they bluster first, and then they whine; and the rare exceptions only make the great drab mass seem even more nauseating. . . .

But the crushing of that race will have been hard,

the sacrifices great. And even so will the results of those sacrifices be great. Of social problems I am, as I have said, not qualified to speak ; indeed of any of the great problems of reconstruction it would be presumption on my part to hold forth.

It is not for the soldier to see visions and dream dreams : there are others more fitted, more suited to the task. It is of the individual I have written ; it is to the individual I dedicate the result of my labours.

I remember meeting a Padre one day several months ago. He was conjuring at a concert for an Infantry Battalion that evening—between the forefinger and thumb of the right hand you now perceive a baby giraffe sort of business—and I told him I thought it was very good of him to take the immense amount of trouble he always did to amuse the boys.

" Good ! " His face expressed genuine amazement. " Good ! To these boys ! I tell you, when I think of what the ordinary private soldier is doing for me—aye ! and for all of us who are not in the Infantry—I just stand quite still and take off my hat."

And so I have written of the individual. Inadequately it is true, and with a due sense of my shortcomings in attempting the task, I have written of the men I have met and lived with across the narrow sea. Not of armies and army corps, not of divisions and brigades, but of the units—the individual men—who form them. For it is the man we know. It is the man who has suffered and endured, the man who

touches our laughter and our tears. He has given his all, unstintingly, unsparingly; and now, perchance, he lies peaceful and at rest in the land where the seed has been sown; perchance he will come back to the country he has fought for when the final reckoning is over. And whichever it is—the quiet, solitary grave with the cross above it and the wild flowers blooming freshly underneath the crumbling walls of a town that was; or the taking up again of the work so long neglected—the office or the ranch, the railway in Yukon or the rubber in Malay—whichever it is, he has played the great game well. To him the great reward. . . .

And the women? the women who have suffered and endured with their men—more than their men. To some the great reunion, the blessed feeling that it is over. Never again will he go into the great unknown; never again that clutching terror of the telegraph boy. He has come back, and there shall be no more parting. The joy bells will be ringing out: the war will be over—won.

Thus shall it be for some.

And for the others. . . .

It is not for me to comfort: there are things too deep for the written word. Only one thing I say, and I say it with a full sense of its pitiful inadequacy. When the joy bells do ring out, and in the ringing seem to mock so hideously the empty chair, the voice for ever silent, then in that bitter moment, remember one thing. Somewhere or other, in the

Soldier's Valhalla, he is waiting for you—waiting with a trusty band of friends, happy, contented, proud. He was glad to pay that final price ; he knows now, where all is clear, that it was necessary. He would have you know it too. . . .

For except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die. . . .

THE END

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